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THE MAJOR WORKS of HAROLD FREDERIC

volume five

The English Novels

MARCH HARES · GLORIA MUNDI

THE MARKET PLACE

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March Hares

TO OUR FRIEND

JULIA

MARCH HARES.

CHAPTER I.

On the morning of his thirtieth birthday, Mr. David Mosscrop lounged against the low stone parapet of Westminster Bridge, and surveyed at length the unflagging procession of his fellow-creatures plodding past him northward into the polite half of London town.

He had come upon the bridge in a melancholy frame of mind, and had paused first of all gloomily to look down at the water. His thoughts were a burden to him, and his head ached viciously. This was no new experience of a morning, worse luck; he had grown accustomed to these evil opening hours of depression and nausea. The fact that it was his birthday, however, gave uncomfortable point to his reflections. He had actually crossed

the threshold of the thirties, and he came into the presence of this new lustrum worse than empty-handed. He had done none of the great things which his youth had promised. He had not even found his way into helpful and cleanly company. The memory of the people with whom he spent his time nowadays —in particular, the recollection of the wastrels and fools with whom he had started out yesterday to celebrate the eve of his anniversary —made him sick. He stared down at the slowly-moving flood, and asked himself angrily why a man of thirty who had learned nothing worth learning, achieved nothing worth the doing; who didn't even know enough to keep sober over-night, should not be thrown like garbage into the river.

The impulse to jump over the parapet hung somewhere very close to the grasp of his consciousness. His mind almost touched it as his eyes dwelt upon the broad, opaque mass of shifting drab waters. He said to himself that he had never before been so near the possibility of deliberate suicide as he was at this moment.

He did not allow the notion to take any more definite shape, but mused for a while upon the fact of its lying there, vaguely formless at the back of his brain, ready to leap into being at his will. Of course, he would not give the word: it was merely interesting to think that he was in the same street, so to speak, with the spirit of self-murder.

After a little, the effect of this steadily drifting body of water seemed to soothe his vision. He grew less conscious of mental disturbance and physical disgust alike. Then he stood up, yawned, and glanced at the big clock-tower, where the laggard hands still clung to the unreasonable neighbourhood of seven o'clock. For some reason, he felt much better. The sensation was very welcome. He drew a long breath of satisfaction, and, leaning with his back to the stonework, fell to watching the people go past. By a sudden revulsion of mood, he discovered all at once that the excess of the night was now offering him compensations. His brain was extremely clear, and, now that the lees of drink were gone, served

him with an eager and almost fluttering acuteness which it was pleasant to follow.

He noted with minute attention the varying types of workmen, shopgirls, clerks, and salesmen as they trooped by in the throng, and found himself devoting to each some appropriate mental comment, some wondering guess into their history, or some flash of speculation as to their future. The instantaneous play of his fancy among these flitting items brought great diversion. He rollicked in it—picking out as they trudged along side by side the book-keeper who was probably short in his accounts, the waiter who had been backing the wrong horses, the barmaid with the seraph's face who at luncheon time would be listening unmoved to conversation from City men fit to revolt a dock labourer. It was indeed as good as a play, this marvellous aggregation of human dramatic possibilities surging tirelessly before him. He wondered that he had never thought of seeing it before.

From amusing details his mind lifted itself to larger conceptions. He thought of the

mystery of London's vast economy; of all its millions playing dumbly, uninstructedly, almost like automata, their appointed parts in the strange machinery by which so many droves of butchers' cattle, so many thousands of tons of food and trucks of clothing and coals and oil were brought in daily, and Babylon's produce was sent out again in balancing repayment. The miracle of these giant scales being always kept even, of London's ever-craving belly and the country's never-failing response, loomed upon his imagination. Then, stifling another yawn, it occurred to him that a brain capable of such flights deserved a better fate than to be banged out by a dirty tide against some slime-stained wharf-pile down the river. Yes, and it merited a nobler lot in life, too, than that of being nightly drenched with poisonous drink. Decidedly he would forswear sack, and live cleanly.

The hour struck in the clock-tower. The boom of the great bell swelled hopefully upon his hearing. The chime of the preceding quarter had saddened him, because he heard

in it the knell of thirty wasted years. The louder resonance now bore a different meaning. A birthday exposed a new leaf as well as turned down an old one. The twenties were behind him, and undoubtedly they were not nice. Very well; he turned his back upon them. The thirties were all before him; and, as Big Ben thundered forth its deep-voiced clamour, he straightened himself, and turned to look them confidently in the face.

His eyes fell upon the figure of a young woman, advancing in a little eddy of isolation from the throng, a dozen feet away. Even on the instant he was conscious of a feeling that his gaze had not distinguished her from the others by mere chance; it was, indeed, as if there were no others. In the concentrated scrutiny which he found himself bending upon her, there was a sense of compulsion. His perceptions raced to meet and envelop her.

She was almost tall, and in carriage made the most of her inches. She had much yellow hair of a noticeable sort, pale flaxen in bulk

but picked with lemon in its lights, about her brows. He thought that it was dyed, and in the same breath knew better. He mastered the effect of her fine face—with its regular contour, its self-conscious eyes, its dainty rose-leaf of a chin thrust reliantly forth above a broad, white throat—all in some unnamed fraction of a second.

The impression of her filled every corner of his mind. He tried to think about who and what she was, and only built up scaffoldings of conjecture to knock them down again. She was a girl who tried on mantles and frocks in some big Regent Street place: no, the lack of dignity in such an avocation would be impossible to one who carried her chin so high. A woman journalist? No, she was too pretty for that. What was she—type-writer, restaurant-waitress, saleswoman? No, these all wore black, with white collar and wristbands; and her apparel was of an almost flaring order. Her large-sleeved bodice of flowered blue silk, snug to the belted waist, suggested Henley rather than the high road out

of squalid Lambeth. Her straw sailor-hat, jauntily borne on the primrose fluff and coils of hair, belonged, too, not a mile lower on the river than Teddington. She should by rights have a racquet in her hand, and be moving along over the close-shaved lawn of Ranelagh's park, on a hazy, languid summer afternoon. What on earth was she doing on Westminster Bridge, at this ridiculous hour, in this dismal company?

Then speculation died abruptly. She was close to him now, and he recognized her. She was a young woman whom he had seen in the British Museum reading-room a score of times. Her face was entirely familiar to him. Only the other day he had got down for her, from the county-histories shelves, two ponderous volumes which she had seemed unable to manage by herself. She had thanked him with a glance and a pleasant nod. He seemed to recall in that glance a tacit admission that they were old acquaintances by sight. He looked her square in the eye, meanwhile, the inner muscles of his face preparing and holding in

readiness a smile in case she gave a sign of remembering him.

For a moment it appeared that she was passing without recognition. He had the presence of mind to feel that this was a gross and inexcusable mischance. His feet instinctively poised themselves to follow her, as if it were for this, and this only, that they had tarried so long on the bridge.

Before he could take a step, however, she had halted, and, in a wavering fashion, moved sidelong out of the main current of pedestrianism. She stood irresolutely by the parapet for a few seconds, with a pretence of being interested in the view of the river and the prim stretch of Parliamentary architecture on its right bank. Then, with a little shrug of decision, she turned to him.

"It is a fine morning," she said.

He had stepped to her side, and he bent upon her now the smile which had so nearly gone a-begging. "I was afraid you hadn't noticed me—and I had quite resolved to go after you."

She flashed inquiry into his face, then let her glance wander vaguely off again. "Oh, I saw you well enough," she confessed, with a curious intermingling of hesitation and boldness; "but at first I wasn't going to pretend I did. In fact, I don't in the least know why I did stop. Or, rather, I *do* know, but you don't, and you never will. That is to say, *I* shan't tell you!"

"Oh, but I do know," he answered genially. "How should you imagine me so deficient in discernment? Only—only, I think I won't tell either."

She looked at him again with a kind of startled intentness, and parted her lips as if to speak. He fancied that he caught in this gaze the suggestion of a painful and humbled diffidence. But then she tossed her head with a saucy air and smiled archly. "What a tremendous secret we shall carry to our graves!" she laughed. "Tell me, do you sleep on the bridge? One hears such remarkable stories, you know, about the readers at the Museum."

He regarded her with pleasure beaming in

his eyes. "No, I go entirely without sleep," he replied, with gravity, "and walk about the streets turning a single idea for ever in my mind; and every morning at daybreak—oh, this has gone on for years now—I come here to watch for the beautiful girl with the yellow hair who some time is to come up to me and remark, 'It is a fine morning.' A fortune-teller told me, ever so long ago, that this was what I must do, and I've never had a moment's rest since."

"You must be very tired," she commented, "and a good deal mixed in your mind, too, especially since yellow hair has come so much into fashion. And did the fortune-teller mention what was to happen after the—the beautiful lady had really appeared?"

"Ah, that is another of my secrets!" he cried, delightedly.

They had begun to stroll together toward the clock-tower. The throng bustling heedlessly past with hurried steps gave them an added sense of detachment and companionship. They kept close together by the para-

pet, their shoulders touching now and again. When they reached the end of the bridge, and paused to look again upon the river prospect, their manner had taken on the ease of people who have known each other for a long time.

The tide was running out now with an exaggerated show of perturbed activity. The girl bent over, and stared at the hurrying current, sweeping along in swirling eddies under the arch, and sucking at the brown-grey masonry of the embankment wall as it passed. Her silence in this posture stretched out over minutes, and he respected it.

At last she had looked her fill and turned, and they resumed their walk. "I could never understand drowning," she remarked, musingly; "it doesn't appeal to me at all, somehow. They talk about its being pleasant after the first minute or so, but I don't believe it. Do you?"

"There might possibly be some point about it—if one could choose the fluid," he replied, achieving flippancy with an effort. "Like the Duke of Clarence, for example."

"How do you mean? The papers all said it was influenza. Oh, I see—you mean the Shakespeare one." Her good faith was undoubted. "But no, we were speaking of drowning—of suicide."

"No, we weren't," he said, soberly. The memory of his own mood a brief half-hour ago stirred uneasily within him. "And we're not going to, either. What the mischief have you—young and healthy and happy and pretty as a peach—to do with any such things?"

"In fact," she went on thoughtfully, as if he had not spoken, "all kinds of death seem an outrage to me. They make me angry. It is too stupid to have to die. What right have other people to say to me, 'Now you must die'? I was born to live just as much as they were, and I have every whit as much right on the earth as they have. And I have a right to what I need to keep me alive, too. That must be so, according to common-sense!"

Mosscrop had listened to this declaration of principles but indifferently. A sense of drowsiness had stolen over him, and, yielding

to it for the moment, he had hung his head, with an aimless regard upon the pavement. All at once he caught sight of something that roused him. His companion's little boot, disclosed in movement beneath her skirt, was broken at the side, and almost soleless. He lagged behind for a step or two, and made sure of what he saw. The girl in the silken blouse was shod like a beggar.

"Which way are you going?" he asked, with a pretence of suddenly remembering something. He had halted, and they stood at the corner, looking up Whitehall. He smothered a yawn with a little explanatory laugh. "I made rather a night of it—it's my birthday to-day—and I'm half asleep. I hadn't noticed where we'd walked to. I hope I haven't taken you out of your way."

The girl hesitated, looked up the broad, stately street, and bit her lip in strenuous thought of some sort.

"Good morning, then!" she blurted out, confusedly, and turned to move away.

The impulse to be quit of her had been

very sharply defined in his mind, and had dictated not only his words, but his awkward, half-shamefaced, half-familiar, manner in suggesting a parting. Now it vanished again with miraculous swiftness.

"No, no! You mustn't go off like that!" he urged, and sprang forward to her side. "I only asked you which was your way."

She was blinking her eyes in a struggle to regain facial composure. He could see that she had been on the point of tears, and the sight moved him to recklessness. It was not surprising to hear her confess: "Me? I have no way."

He took charge of her with a fine paternal tone. "Oh yes, you have! Your way is my way. You are going with me. It's my birthday, you know, and you have come to help me celebrate it. What do you say to beginning with a special breakfast?—or perhaps you've spoiled your appetite already. But you can pretend to eat a little."

The girl laughed aloud, with pathetic irony at some conceit which curled her lip in scorn-

ful amusement. Words rose to her tongue, but she forbore to utter them, and stared up the street.

"You'll come along, won't you?" He had held up his hand, and a four-wheeler, with a driver and horse of advanced years and dejected aspect, was crawling diagonally across the roadway toward them.

She took courage to look him frankly in the face. "I shall be very much obliged to you, indeed," she said, keeping her voice up till the avowal should be finished. "I've had no breakfast."

The ancient cab, with a prodigious rattling of framework and windows for its snail's progress, bore them along past Trafalgar Square, and westward through narrow streets, already teeming with a busy, foreign-looking life, till it halted before a restaurant in one of the broader thoroughfares of Soho.

When they had alighted, and the sad old driver, pocketing his shilling in scowling silence, had started off, a thought occurred to Mosscrop.

"I tell you what we'll do," he broke forth. "We'll decree that it's your birthday, too, so that we can celebrate them together. That will be much more fun. And before we go into breakfast, I must get you a little present of some sort, just to mark the occasion. Come, you haven't anything to say about it at all. It's my affair, entirely."

He led the way along past several shops, and halted in front of a narrow window in which a small collection of women's boots was displayed. A man in shirt-sleeves and apron had just taken down the shutter, and stood now in the doorway, regarding them with a mercantile yet kindly smile.

"It is the best Parisian of make," the shoeman affirmed, to help forward Mosscrop's decision.

"You can see how different they are from ordinary English things," said David, argumentatively. "The leather is like a glove, and the workmanship—observe that! I don't believe any lady could have a more unique present than a pair of real French boots."

The girl had come up, and stood close beside him, almost nestling against his shoulder. He saw in the glass the dim reflection of her pleased face, and moved toward the door as if it were all settled. Then, as he stepped on the threshold, she called to him.

"No—please!" she urged. "I think we won't, if you don't mind."

"Of course we will!" he insisted, turning in the doorway. "Why on earth shouldn't we? It's your birthday, you know. Come, child, you mustn't be obstinate; you must be nice, and do what you're told."

As she still hung back, shaking her head, he went out to her. "What's the matter? You liked the idea well enough a minute ago. I saw you smiling in the window there. Come! don't let a mere trifle like this spoil the beginning of our great joint-birthday. It's too bad of you! Won't you really have the boots —from me?"

"Well," she made answer, falteringly, "it's very kind—but if I do, I'd rather you didn't come into the shop—that is, that you went out

while I was trying them on—because—well, it is my birthday, you know, and I must have my own way—a little. You will stop outside, won't you?"

This struck him as perhaps an excess of maidenly reserve. He smiled impatiently. "By all means, if it is your whim. But—but I'm bound to say—I suppose different people draw the line at different places, but feet always seemed to me to be relatively blameless things, as things go. Still, of course, if it's your idea."

"No, if you take it that way," she said, "we'll go and get our breakfast, and say no more about it." She found the fortitude to turn away from the window as she spoke.

"If *I* take it that way!" The perverseness of this trivial tangle annoyed him. "Why, I consented to stop outside, didn't I? What more is demanded? Do you want me to pass a vote of confidence, or shall I whistle during the performance, so that you may know I am cheerful, or what? Suppose I told you that I

had been a salesman in a boot-shop myself, and had measured literally thousands of pretty little feet—would that reassure you? I might come in, then, mightn't I?"

"No—you never were *that*—you are a gentleman." She stole a perplexed glance up at him, and sighed. "I should dearly love the boots—but you won't understand. I don't know how to make you." Looking into his face, and catching there a reflection of her own dubiety, she burst suddenly into laughter. "You are a gentleman, but you are a goose, too. My stockings are too mournful a patchwork of holes and darning to invite inspection—if you will have it."

"Poor child!" He breathed relief, as if a profoundly menacing misunderstanding had been cleared up. "Here, take this and run across to that fat Jewess in the doorway there. She will fit you out."

Presently she returned, with beaming eyes, and an air of shyness linked with complacent self-approbation which he found delightful.

"Oh, I should simply insist on your coming in *now*," she cried gaily, at the door of the boot-shop, in answer to his mock look of deferential inquiry.

CHAPTER II.

"THERE surely was never such another breakfast in the world!"

She spoke with frank sincerity. Upon afterthought she added: "I don't believe any woman could order a meal like that. You men always know so much about eating."

Mosscrop leant back in his chair, crossed his knees, and took a cigar from his pocket. His mind ran in pleasurable retrospect over the dishes—a fragrant omelette with mushrooms, a sole *Marguerite*, a delicate little steak that had been steeped in oil over night, a pulpy Italian cheese which he never got elsewhere than here. The tall-shouldered, urn-shaped green bottle on the table still held a little Capri, and he poured it into her glass.

"Yes," he assented, "I find myself paying

more attention to food as I get older. It is the badge of advancing years. It *is* a good little restaurant, isn't it? I come here a great deal."

"And that is how you are able to order such wonderful breakfasts for hungry young ladies. It comes of practice. Do they all enjoy it as much as I have?"

"You mustn't ask things like that," he remonstrated, smilingly, as he lit a match. "I hope you don't mind?—thanks." He regarded her contemplatively through the dissolving haze of the first mouthful of smoke. They had the small upstairs dining-room to themselves, and she, from her seat by the window, let her glances wander from him to the street below, and back again, with a charming, child-like effect of being delighted with everything. The sight of her opposite him stirred new emotions in his being. He imported a gentle gravity into his smile, and dropped the jesting tone from his voice. "No—we must play that I have never breakfasted with anybody before—like this—either here or any-

where else. Let us both start fresh on our birthday. We wipe everything off the slate, and make a clean beginning. First of all, you haven't told me your name."

"My name is Vestalia Peaussier."

"Then you are *not* English? I could have sworn you were the most typically English girl I'd ever laid eyes on."

"My father was a French gentleman—an officer, and a man of position. He died—killed in a duel—when I was very young. I do not remember him at all. My mother brought me away from France at once. She was dreadfully crushed, poor lady. She was the daughter of a very old Scottish house—it had been a runaway love match—and her people, my grandparents——"

"What part of Scotland? What was their name? I am a Scot myself, you know."

Vestalia paused briefly, and sipped at her wine. "I was going to say—my grandparents behaved so unfeelingly to my mother that she never permitted herself to mention their name.

I do not know it myself. I gathered as a child from poor mother's words that they were extremely wealthy and proud, and had a title in the family. It is not probable that I shall ever learn more. I should not wish to, either, for it was their hard cruelty which broke my mother's heart. She died two years ago. Poor unhappy lady!"

Mosscrop nodded sympathetically. "And were you left without anything?"

"My mother's private fortune had been diminished to almost nothing by bad investments and the treachery of others before her death. I had no one to advise me—I was all alone—and the lawyers and others probably robbed me cruelly. Only a few of her old family jewels were left to me—and one by one I had to part with these. Some of them, I daresay, were of great antiquity and priceless value, if I had only known, but I was forced to sell them for a song. There were wonderful signet-rings among them, all with the crest of the family—I suppose it must have been her family—and at first I thought of

using it to trace them—but then my girlish pride——"

"What was the crest?" asked David. "Perhaps it wouldn't be too late, now."

Again Vestalia hesitated. Then she shook her head. "No; dear mamma's wishes are sacred to me. I do not wish to learn what she thought it best to keep from me."

"Well—and when the jewels were all sold?"

"Long before that I had begun to work for my living. I write a good hand naturally. I got employment as a copyist, but that did not last very long. I was ambitious, and I thought I might work my way into literature. But it is a very disheartening career, you know."

Mosscrop had lifted his brows in some surprise. He nodded again, with a cursory "Ay!"

"The editors were not at all kind to me," she went on. "I toiled like a slave, but I hardly ever got anything accepted, and then you had to wait months for your pay, and

perhaps not get it at all. I should have starved long ago, if I hadn't met an American woman at the Museum who was over here getting up pedigrees. Oh, not for herself. She made a regular business of it. Rich Americans paid her to hunt up their English ancestors, in genealogies and old records, and on tombstones and so on. I was her assistant for nearly a year, and things went fairly well with me. But three months ago she was taken ill and had to go home, and there I was stranded again. I tried to go on with some of the jobs she left unfinished, but the people had gone away, or hadn't confidence in so young a person, and well—that's all. My landlady turned me out at six o'clock this morning, and she has seized the few poor things I had left—and here I am."

The young man lifted his glass, and clinked it against hers. "I am very glad that you *are* here," he said; and they smiled wistfully into each other's eyes as they finished the Capri.

"It is a heavenly little break in the clouds,

anyway," she went on, dreamily. "It isn't like real life at all: it is the way things happen in fairy stories."

"Quite so. Why shouldn't we have a fairy story all by ourselves? It is every whit as easy as the stupid, humdrum other thing, and a million times nicer. Oh, I'm on the side of the fairies, myself."

She looked out, in an absent fashion, at the windows across the way. The light began to fade from her countenance, and the troubled lines returned. "Every day for a fortnight I have been answering advertisements," she went on, pensively; "some by letter, some in person. There were secretaries' places, but you had to know shorthand, and the typewriter, and all that. Then somehow all the vacancies for shop-women got filled before I applied, or else people with experience in the business were preferred to me. I even went in for the 'lady-help' thing—a kind of domestic servant, you know, only you get less pay and don't wear a cap—but nobody would have me. My hair was too good and

my boots were too bad. The lady of the house just stared at these two things, every place I applied at, and said she was afraid I wouldn't answer."

The picture she drew was painful to Mosscrop, and he made an effort to lighten it with levity. "I confess I didn't think very highly of your boots, myself," he said, cheerily, "but I admire your hair immensely."

"Oh, but you are a man!"

He chuckled amiably at the implication of her retort, and she laughed a little, too, in a reluctant way. "It occurs to me," he ventured, pausing over his words, "that men seem to have played no part whatever in the story of your life."

"No, absolutely none," she answered, with prompt decision. "I have never before been beholden to a man for so much as a biscuit or a shoe-button. I don't know that you will believe me when I tell you, but I've never even been alone in a room with a man before in my life."

"Of course, I believe what you say. It is

remarkably interesting, though. Come! First impressions are the very salt of life. I should dearly like to know what you think of the novel experience, as far as you've gone."

She seemed to take him seriously. Placing her elbows on the table, and poising her chin between thumbs and forefingers, she bestowed a frank scrutiny upon his face, as intent and dispassionate as the gaze which a professor of palmistry fastens upon the lines of the client's hand.

"First of all," she said, deliberately, "I am not so afraid of you as I was."

"Delightful!" he cried. "Then I did inspire terror at the outset. It has been the dream of my life to do that—if only just once. I feared I should never succeed. My dear lady, you have rescued me from my own contempt. My career is not a blank failure after all. We must have coffee and a liqueur after that!"

He pressed the bell at his side. She frowned a little at his merry exuberance.

"I am not joking," she complained. "You asked me to say just what I felt."

He nodded his contrition as the waiter left the room.

"Yes, do," he urged. "I will keep as still as a mouse."

"I am not as afraid of you as I was," she repeated, dogmatically. "But I think, even if I knew you ever so well, I should always be just the least weeny bit afraid. I can see that you are very kind—my Heavens! nobody else has ever been a hundredth part as kind to me as you are—but all the same—yes, there is a *but*, if I can explain it to you—I get a feeling that you are being kind because it affords you yourself pleasure, rather than because it helps me. No—that is not quite what I mean either. It seems to me that a man will be much kinder than any woman knows how to be, so long as he feels that way; but when he doesn't feel that way any more—well, then he'll chuck the whole thing, and never give it another thought."

"That is very intelligent," said Mosscrop.

He had the appearance of turning it over in his mind, and liking it the more upon consideration. "Yes, that is soundly reasoned. I can well believe your mother was a Scots lass."

Vestalia flushed, no doubt with pride.

"Well, then, hear me out," she said, with a pleasant little assumption of newly-gained authority. "Now, I've hardly known a man to speak to—that is, a gentleman, as a friend, you know—if I'm justified in calling you so on such short acquaintance—or no, I mustn't say that, must I? We *are* friends—but it's a new experience, quite, to me. As you say, I have my first impression of what it is like to have a man for a friend."

The waiter, pushing the door open with his foot, brought in a tray with white cups and silver pots, and wee tinted glasses, and a tall, shapeless bottle encased in a basket-work covering of straw.

"I ordered maraschino," remarked Mosscrop, as the man poured the coffee. "If you prefer any other, why, of course——"

"Oh no; whatever you say is good, I take with my eyes shut."

She sipped at the little glass he had filled for her, and then, with a movement of lips and tongue, mused upon the unaccustomed taste. An alert glance shot at him from her eyes.

"I hope——" she began to say, and stopped short.

"You hope what?"

"No; I won't say what I was going to. It would have been a very ungrateful speech. Only, you must bear in mind that I hardly know one wine from another, and I am leaving myself absolutely in your hands. You will see to it, won't you, that—that I don't drink more than I ought."

Mosscrop waved his hand in smiling reassurance.

"But now for that famous first impression of yours."

She narrowed her eyelids to look at him, and he found her glance invested with something like tenderness of expression. Her head

was tilted a bit to one side, so that the light from the window fell full upon the face. It was a more beautiful face than he had thought, with exquisitely faint and shell-like gradations of colour upon the temples and below the ears, where the strange but lovely primrose hair began. A soft rose-tint had come into her cheeks, which had seemed pallid an hour before. The whole countenance was rounded and mellowed and beautified in his eyes, as he answered her lingering, approving gaze.

"My impression?" she spoke slowly, and with none of the assurance which had marked her earlier deliverance. "Well, you know, I don't feel as if I knew *men* any more than I did before. I only know one man—a very, very little. I don't believe that other men are at all like him, or else we should hear about it. The world would be full of it. No one would talk of anything else. But the man I *do* know —that is, a little—well, I'd rather know him than all the women that ever were born, even if I had to be afraid of him all the while into the bargain."

Mosscrop laughed.

"We did well to label it in advance as a *first* impression. It is the judgment of a babe just opening its eyes. My dear child, I'm afraid this isn't your birthday, after all. You're clearly not a year old yet."

"You always joke, but I'm in sober earnest." She indeed spoke almost solemnly, and with an impressive fervour in her voice. "You do impress me just like that. I wish you'd believe that I'm saying exactly what I feel. Mind, I expressly said, I don't suppose for a minute that other men are like you."

"No, you're right there," he broke in.

Her manner, even more than the speech, affected him curiously. He drained his liqueur at a gulp, stared out of the window, fidgetted on his chair, finally rose to his feet.

"You're right there!" he reiterated, biting his cigar and thrusting his hands deep in his pockets. She would have risen also, but he signed to her to sit still. "Other men are not like me, and they can thank God that they're

not. They know enough to keep sober; I don't. They are of some intelligent use in the world; I'm not. They lead cleanly and decent lives, they control themselves, they make names for themselves, they do things which are of some benefit at least to *somebody*. Ah-h! You hit the nail on the head. They *are* different from me!"

She gazed up at him, dumb with sheer surprise. He took a few aimless steps up and down, halted to scowl out of the window at the signs opposite, and then flung himself into the chair again. Sprawling his elbows on the table, he bent forward and fastened upon her a look of such startled intensity that she trembled under it and drew back.

"Why, do you know, you foolish little girl," he began, in a hoarse, declamatory voice, "that a few minutes before you came along, there on the bridge, I was going to throw myself into the river, because I wasn't fit to live. Do you realize that I had sat in judgment upon myself, and condemned myself to death—death, mind you!—because I was

an utterly hopeless creature, a waste product, a drunkard, a sterile fool and loafer, a veritable human swine? That is the truth! Do you know where I spent last night—where I woke up, sick with disgust for myself, this morning? No, you don't; and there's no need that I should tell you."

"I don't care!" The girl's lips propelled the words forth with extraordinary swiftness, but the eyes with which she regarded her companion, and the rest of her face, grown pale once more, remained unmoved.

"No, *you* don't care!" he groaned out a long sigh, and went on with waning vigour. "But *I* care! It is something to *me* that I am what I am; that I have wasted my life, that I have done nothing, and worse than nothing, with my chances, that I——"

"You misunderstand me," Vestalia interposed, with a perturbed simulation of calm. "What I meant was that whatever happened last—that is, at any time before this morning —makes no difference whatever in my—my

liking for you." Her eyes brightened at the thought of something. "It was you yourself who said we would wipe the slate clean, and begin all over again quite fresh. Don't you remember? And we were to have our own fairy story, all to ourselves. You do remember, don't you?"

He still breathed heavily, but the gloom upon his face began to abate as he looked at her. He moved one of his hands forward on the table to the neighbourhood of hers, and stroked the cloth gently as if it were her hand he touched. A weary smile, born in his eyes, strengthened and spread to soften his whole countenance.

"Yes, I remember everything," he mused, with a kind of forlorn gladness in his tone. It seemed an invitation to silence, and they sat without words for a little.

With a constrained air of having convinced herself by argument that it was the right thing to do, Vestalia all at once lifted her hand, and laid it lightly on his. He fancied that it trembled a little. His own

certainly shook, though he pressed it firmly upon the table.

"Now the bad spirits have all gone," he said; "it is fairyland again."

"Ah, we must keep it so," she answered, and pressed his hand softly before she withdrew her own. The black mood had fled from him as swiftly as it came. Vestalia's eyes beamed at the sight of his restored good-humour with himself, and she nodded gay approbation.

"I fancy we've about exhausted the delights of this place," he remarked, after a brief silence filled for both of them with a pleasantly sufficient sense of friendship at its ease. "I'll pay the bill, and we'll toddle."

She glanced about her. "I shall always remember this dear little stuffy old room. I almost hate to leave it at all. I want to fix in my mind just how it looks."

"Oh, we'll come often again," he remarked, lightly. Then it occurred to him that this assurance contained perhaps an ele-

ment of rashness. "Have you got anything special to do to-day?" he asked, with awkward abruptness.

The question puzzled and troubled her. "I *was* going to celebrate my birthday," she murmured, with a wistful, flickering smile ready to fade into depression.

"Of course you are; that's all settled," he responded, making up by the heartiness of his tone for the forgetful stupidity of his query. "What I meant was—what *were* you thinking of doing before—before you knew you had a birthday on hand?"

Vestalia examined the bottom of her coffee-cup, and poked at it with the spoon. "Me? Oh, I had several things to do," she made reply, hesitatingly. "I had to find something to eat, and contrive how to earn some money, and hunt up a new lodging, and see how I was going to feed myself to-morrow, and—and other small matters of that sort."

His comment was prefaced with a kind, sad little laugh.

"You must go to the old place, and get

your things," he said. "How much do you owe?"

"I'd rather not go back at all." She ventured to look up at him now. "I don't want ever to lay eyes on that old hag again."

"But your things. If I sent a commissionaire, would she give them up?—on payment of the bill, of course."

"They're not worth a bus-fare—they're really not. You see," she went on with her reluctant confidences, "I had to pawn everything. These clothes I have on are every rag I have left."

Mosscrop, regarding her with a sympathetic gaze, recalled very clearly the gown she used to wear at the Museum. It was a queer colour—a sort of rusty greenish-blue; it was of common stuff, and made without a waist, in some outlandish Grosvenor Gallery fashion novel to his eye. The practical side of him stumbled at this memory. "But if you had to pawn things," he said, "I should have thought these silks you have on would have gone first. That frock you used to wear at

the Museum, for instance—you could only have raised a few pence on that—whereas these things—I'm afraid, my young friend, that you haven't a good business head."

"Oh, better than you think," she retorted, with downcast eyes. Her further words cost her a visible effort. "I thought it all out, and I saw that my only chance was to hang on to these clothes. If people didn't happen to look at my boots, I was all right. Men don't notice such things much—you yourself didn't at first. And my skirt would hide them, more or less."

He looked at her averted face, slowly assimilating the meaning of what she said. Then he hastily turned his chair sidewise, rang the bell for the waiter, lit a fresh cigar, and blew out the match with a sigh which deepened into an audible groan.

"What else could I do?" she faltered, with a flushing cheek, and a tear-dimmed stare out of the window. "Nothing but throw myself into the river. And that I *won't* do. They have no right to insist upon my doing

that. If I was old and horrid, it wouldn't matter so much. But I'm young, and I want to live. That's all I ask—just the chance to live. And that I won't let them rob me of, if I can help it."

The waiter, counting out the change, embraced the couple in a series of calm, sidelong glances. He expressed polite thanks for the shilling pushed aside toward him, and closed the door behind him when he left the room with an emphasized firmness of touch.

Mosscrop rose. "Come, child," he said, briskly. "Cheer up! Look up at me—let's see a smile on your face. A little brighter, please—that's more like it. Now we *have* wiped the slate clean! We begin absolutely fresh. Dry your eyes, and we'll make a start. We've got those celebrated birthdays of ours to look after—and it's high time we set about it."

She stood up, and smilingly obeyed him by dabbing the napkin against her nose and brows. She moved across to the mirror above

the mantel, and smiled again at what she saw. Then she looked down at her boots, and her face took on a radiance, which it kept, as she descended close behind him the narrow stairway.

CHAPTER III.

THERE was a bar at the front of the restaurant—a cheerful, domestic bar of the Italian sort, with a bright-eyed, smiling, middle-aged woman in charge. She knew Mosscrop, and flashed a kindly glance of southern comradeship at him as he came forward, and stopped and drew his cheque-book from his pocket. There were also two girls in the bar, and they knew him too, and grinned gently at his salute. Vestalia watched them narrowly, and fancied that one of them also winked.

"I had to stop and get some more money," he explained, when they were in the street together. "There isn't another place in these parts where they would change a cheque."

"I noticed that they seemed to know you," she replied, with reserve.

"Dear people that they are!" he cried. "The sight of them in the morning is always delightful to me. Did you observe it—the extraordinary cheerfulness of them all? You saw how the girls chaffed the ice-man, and how the fellow who brought in the soda-water cases had his joke with the waiters, and how madame clucked and chuckled like a good hen, as if they were all her brood, and everybody seemed to like everybody else?"

"I didn't get the notion that they were very keen about *me*," remarked Vestalia. "As a matter of sober fact, they scowled."

"Nonsense! Of course they were deferential to you—you represented a sort of dignified unaccustomedness to them, and they were afraid to beam at you. But bless you, they're as simple and as sweet-hearted as children. They laugh and smile at people just out of pure native amiability. The place is as good as a tonic to me of a morning when I am feeling blue and out of sorts."

"But you are not *this* morning," she reminded him.

For answer he drew her hand through his arm. They fell into step, and moved along at a sauntering gait on their way toward Oxford Street.

It was mid-August, and there had been a shower overnight. The pavement still showed damp in its crevices, and the air was clear and fresh. A pale hazy sunshine began to mark out shadows in the narrow thoroughfares. By-and-by it would be hot and malodorous here, but just now the sense of summer's charm found them out even in Soho.

She had asked him about himself. The question had risen naturally enough to her lips, and she had propelled it without diffidence. But when the words actually sounded in her own ears, they frightened her. The inquiry seemed all at once personal to the point of rudeness. The possibility of his resenting her curiosity rose in her mind, and on the instant flared upward into painful certainty.

"Oh, forgive me; I had no business to ask you!" she hurriedly added.

He laughed, and patted her arm. "Why on earth shouldn't you?"

"I spoke without thinking," she faltered. "I suppose—that is, it occurs to me—perhaps gentlemen don't like to be questioned—what I mean is, you didn't answer, and I was afraid——"

"Afraid nothing!" he reassured her. "You mustn't dream of being stand-offish with me. I shall get vexed with you if you do. My dear little lady, there isn't anything in the world that you're not as free as air to say to me, or ask me. I only hesitated because"—he began, smiling in a rueful, whimsical way down at her—"because it's too complicated and sinister a recital to rush lightly into. My name is David Mosscrop, and I am an habitual criminal by profession. That will do to start with."

Vestalia looked earnestly into his face for some sign that he was jesting. It was a clean-shaven face, cast by nature in a mould of gravity. The eyes had seemed a pleasant grey to her first cursory examination; but

now, on closer scrutiny, there might be a hardness as of steel in their colour. The lips and chin, too, had a sharpness of line that could mean unamiable things. And yet, how could she credit his words? It was true, she recalled, that by all accounts many superior gamblers, burglars, and other evil characters were in private life most kindly persons—of notoriously generous impulses. Pictures of the outlaws of romance, from Robin Hood to Dick Ryder, crowded upon her mental vision. The countenance into which she tremulously stared might have belonged to any of them—a little blurred by the effects of recent drink, a trifle stained in its lower parts by the need of a razor, yet adventurous, subtle, courageous; above all, commanding. Her heart fluttered at the thought of her own temerity in leaning on his arm, and she shot a swift glance forward toward the big thoroughfare they were nearing, where there would be crowds of people to see her. Then she tightened her hold, and said to herself that she didn't mind a bit.

"You said I might ask anything I liked," she found herself saying. "What is your special line of crime?"

"Well, specifically, I don't know just how they would define me. I am not quite a confidence-man, because nobody ever reposes an atom of confidence in me. Mine is a peculiar sort of case. I cannot be said to deceive any one by my game, and yet, undoubtedly, I come under the general head of impostors. I make my living by obtaining money under false pretences."

The girl was frankly mystified. This sounded so poor and mean that her instincts fluttered back to the original notion that he was joking. Sure enough, she could see the laughter latent in his eyes, now that she looked again.

"You're just fooling!" she protested, and tugged admonishingly upon his arm. "Tell me what it is you do, quick!"

"How do you know I do anything?" he demanded. He hugged her arm against his side, to show what great fun it all was.

"Why shouldn't I be a gentleman at large? There are such things, you know."

She shook her head. "Gentlemen at large don't read hard at the Museum in August. I never understood they were much given to reading at any time of year, for that matter. No, I know you do something. You are in a profession; I can see that. You are not a doctor; you are too polite and kind-mannered for that. I thought at first that you were a journalist, but they don't have cheque-books. Oh, tell me, please!"

He laughed gaily. "Ten thousand guesses and you'd never hit it. My dear lady, I profess Culdees."

Vestalia pondered the information with gravity for a little, stealing sidelong glances to learn if this was more of his fun. "You can see how ignorant I am," she remarked at last. "You will recognise presently that you are wasting your time with me. What *are* Culdees? Or is it a thing? I assure you I haven't the remotest notion."

"It is a secret," he assured her, in tones

which strove to be serious, but revealed a jocose note to her ear.

She shook his arm gleefully. "As if we could have secrets on our birthday!" she cried. "Tell me instantly all about Culdees! I insist."

"But I don't know anything about them. That is the secret—nobody knows anything about them. I draw a salary for devoting three weeks each year to explaining to a class of young men who desire to know nothing whatever about the Culdees, that if they did wish to learn about them they couldn't possibly do it."

"Are there any more jobs like that, that you know of?" inquired the girl. "It would just suit me." Then she spoke less flippantly. "I'm afraid you've already discovered how shallow and ill-informed I am. You do not think it is worth while to talk seriously with me!"

He seemed much affected by her rebuke. "My dear lady——" he began, in earnest disclaimer.

"No; what I mean is—" she interrupted him—pleased by his show of contrition, but even more interested in the flow of her own ideas, and the sound of her own voice, which had taken on musical intonations, and delicately-measured cadences since breakfast that were novel to her delighted hearing—"what I mean is, men do not have any real intellectual respect for women; they do not think of them in their deep-down thoughts as their mental equals; they still regard them, as their ancestors did thousands of years ago, as mere toys, playthings, creatures to pat on the cheek and talk pleasant nonsense to, when there is nothing better to do. And the worst of it is that so many women—a large majority—are contented with this, and aspire to nothing higher, and they set the rules for the rest; and hence young women who *have* ambitions, and do desire to make themselves the equals of men, and set up high ideals of intellectual life, they—they find themselves—find themselves——"

"Find themselves being regarded with

much very genuine liking and friendship by those to whom they are good enough to give their company," Mosscrop finished the sentence for her. He smiled to himself as he pressed her arm still more closely. The girl was not accustomed to drink, and the Capri and maraschino had gone to her tongue. He was pleasantly conscious of their influences himself, and upon second thought he liked his companion all the more for the innocent fearlessness with which she had followed his example. The charm of the whole experience strengthened its hold upon him. He looked down with tenderness upon her. "Yes, very genuine friendship—and gratitude," he reiterated, with ardour in his low voice.

She did not conceal the enjoyment she had in both look and tone. "The idea of *real* companionship is so precious in my eyes," she murmured—"a true communion of minds. There is nothing else in life worth living for. Do you think there can be any *real* friendship without genuine intellectual respect?"

"Oh, I wouldn't lay too much stress on

that myself," he answered, lightly. "I find that the fellows I really like the most—the men that I take the most solid comfort in putting in time with—are tremendous duffers from any intellectual point of view, but of course"—he found himself hastily adding—"that is among *men*. I have never known anything at all about women friends—that is, of what one may honestly call friends. But I am learning fast. I have reached the point of forming an ideal: she must be tall, with her hat just brushing above my collar. She must have the most wonderful pale yellow hair in the world, and the prettiest face, and new French boots—and——"

"You don't care in the least what kind of a mind she has," put in Vestalia, dolefully.

"Ah, you didn't let me finish. She will have a spirit brave and yet tender, a mind broad and capable yet without arrogance, a temperament attuning itself to each passing mood, sunny, shadowed, merry, pensive, adventurous, timid—all as full of sweet little

turns and twists and unexpected things in general as an April day. I don't want her learned: I should hate her to be logical. I like her just as she is: I wouldn't have her changed for the world."

In details the definition perhaps left something to be desired. But its form of presentation brought a flush of satisfaction to Vestalia's cheek. She nestled closer still against his shoulder for a dozen paces or so, and when she drew away then, let him feel that it was because they were at Oxford Street, and for no other reason.

"Oh, the beautiful day!" was all she said.

They turned to the right, and sauntered aimlessly along down the broad pavement, pausing now and again to glance over some tradesman's display, then drifting onward again, close together. Before a bookseller's window at a corner they made a more considerable halt. Mosscrop scanned the rows of titles minutely, talking as he did so. Thus between comments on the volumes they looked at, and idle remarks on subjects which these

suggested, she picked up this further account of her new friend's affairs.

"I told you I was a Scotchman," he said. "I was the son of a factor, a sort of steward over a biggish estate, and I never did anything but go to school from the earliest moment I can remember. It is as if I was born in a class-room, and cradled on a blackboard. It is a terrible land for that; tuition broods over it like a pestilence. Their idea is to make of each child's brain a sort of intellectual haggis; the more different kinds of stuff there are in it, the greater the fame of the teacher and the pride of the parents. I shudder now when I think how much I knew at the age of twelve. As for my eighteenth year, when I took the Strathbogie exhibition, Confucius, John Knox, and Lord Bacon rolled in one would have been frightened of me. My information was appalling. My mother died from sheer excess of astonishment at having given birth to such a prodigy. My father took to drink. The magnificence of my attainments not only threw him off his balance

—it debauched the entire district. It is the law of history, you know, that communities and nations progress to a certain point, achieve some crowning deed in a golden age of splendid productiveness, and then wither and go off to seed. Well, my parish, having produced me, reached its climax. Industry flagged, enterprise died down; the very land ceased to grow as much corn to the acre as formerly. The people could do nothing but congregate at the taverns and discuss with bated breath my meteoric progress across the academic heavens. Oh, I was a most remarkable young man!

"It happened that there was also a remarkable old man in my neighbourhood. He came from nobody in particular, and went away young. People had long since forgotten that there had been such a lad, when one day he returned to us, well along in years, and infamously rich. I don't mean that he had come wrongfully by his money. God knows how he got it; the story ran that it had something to do with smoked fish. Whatever its source,

his wealth was wanton, preposterous, criminal in its dimensions. He had no kith or kin remaining to him. Of course we knew he would build and endow an educational establishment. All rich old Scotchmen do that, as an ordinary matter. They have reared for us such myriads of brand-new colleges and seminaries on every hillside that I marvel even the rabbits and pheasants can escape learning to spell. There are logarithms in the very atmosphere.

"But this old man was not to be put off with a mere academy. He piled up a veritable castle of instruction, a first-class fortress of learning. And he had an idea of something which should be unique among all the schools of the world. It was all his own idea. Even in Scotland it had not occurred to anyone else. You must know that in early Scotch ecclesiastical history, say from the eighth to the twelfth centuries, there are occasional mentions of some bounders called Culdees, who seem to have run a little sacerdotal show of their own, something between hermits and

canons-regular — it is absolutely impossible now to make out just what they were. But this extraordinary old man was quite clear in his mind about them. He had reasoned it all out for himself. He said that 'Culdees' was, of course, a mere popular corruption of 'Chaldees.' He loved to argue this with all comers, and he did so,—my word for it, he did! Now nobody in Scotland ever agrees with any view or opinion advanced by any other person, but the art of disagreeing has been reduced, by ages of use, to a delicately-modulated system. Everybody disputed his ridiculous notion of the 'Chaldees'—they would have fought it just as stoutly if it had been a wise one—but he was a very rich man, and he had benevolent intentions toward the district, and so they 'roared him gently as any sucking dove.' They couldn't admit his contention, oh no, but they let him feel that they were thinking about it, that it had made an impression on their minds, that in due time they might see it differently.

"The upshot was that the old fool estab-

lished a Culdee Chair in the faculty of his new college, and made it worth more money than any other professorship of the lot. The celebrity of my performances at school was fresh then, and reached his ears. He gave the billet to me, and confirmed it to me in his will when he died, a year later—and that is all."

"And you actually only work three weeks a year? And get paid a whole year's salary for that?"

Vestalia regarded him with astonishment, as she put the question.

They had strolled meanwhile down the great thoroughfare, crossed it, and passed into a narrower lateral by-way.

"It is hardly even three full weeks' work," he replied. "There is nothing to do in the way of fresh discovery. Reeves and Skene and other fellows have gleaned the last spear of straw in the stubble. I do go through the form of getting up some lectures each Autumn, but it is really such dreadful humbug that I'm ashamed to look the students in the

face, let alone my fellow-professors. Fortunately, most of the latter are clergymen, and that makes it a little easier. They know that they are as big frauds as I am, in their own line of goods, and so we say nothing about it."

"What struck me," she began, hesitatingly, "you spoke rather—what I mean is, you don't appear to be very grateful to the old gentleman who arranged all this for you—and to me it seems the most wonderful thing I ever heard of. I should thank his memory on my bended knees every day of my life if *I* were the Professor of Culdees. I couldn't find it in my heart to poke fun at him; I should think of him and revere him as my benefactor, *always!*"

"Hm—m!" said Mosscrop. "I'm not sure I don't wish he'd never been born, or had choked on a bone of one of his own damned Finnan haddies, before ever he came back to us!"

The ring in his voice, like a surly rattling of chains, brought back to her vividly the scene of his despondency at the restaurant.

She made haste to lay her hand upon his arm.

"Oh, do you see where we are?" she cried, vivaciously, snatching at the chance of diversion.

Sure enough, a section of the Museum's stately front lay before them, filling to top-heaviness the perspective of the small street. They had wandered instinctively toward this pre-natal rendezvous of their friendship. Their eyes softened now as they looked at the grey, pillared block of masonry stretching across the end of their by-way.

"It draws us like a magnet," said Mosscrop. "Come, what do you say? Shall we go in for an hour, and wander about as if we were nice rural people come up to London to see the sights? I should like to myself."

"The dear old place!" sighed Vestalia, with mellow tones.

CHAPTER IV.

It was a long hour that the Museum claimed from them.

"This is what always attracts me most of all," said Mosscrop upon entering. He turned to the left, and led the way into the little gallery of the Roman portrait-busts. "Very often I never go any farther than this. The modernness of these fellows is a perpetual marvel to me. It is as if we met them every day. Look at Caracalla and Septimius Severus; they are exactly like Irish members. And see Pertinax, here; I know at least ten old farmers about Elgin who might be his own brothers. Observe this man Hadrian. He is the absolute image of Francis the First. You know the portraits of him at Hampton Court—what? never been there? Ah, that's a place we will

go to together. There is one picture of Francis there—he is very drunk, apparently, and has got hold of the hand of the Duchess of Something-or-other, and she is in her cups, too, and the inane, leering, almost simian happiness of the two—oh, it is worth a long journey just to see that one picture."

"It doesn't sound very inviting," commented Vestalia. "Tipsy women are repulsive, whether they are duchesses or not."

Mosscrop chuckled. "Oh, but you must make allowances for the period. It was the Renaissance, the joyful, exuberant, devil-may-care Renaissance. If once you catch the inner spirit of it, you will feel that it was the most glorious of periods. And Francis the First was the living, breathing type of it. There was a man for you! He celebrated *his* birthday all the year round. And in this particular instance, why, I daresay it was the Duchess's birthday too. I should have thought you would take a more lenient view of such a pleasing double anniversary."

Vestalia looked doubtfully at him. "I

hope you don't mean that *I* am in my cups, as you call it," she said.

He laughed her suspicion down. "No, I won't let you hint at such an absurd thing. My dear friend, I must cultivate your sense of humour. The roots exist, but the growth is choked by the weeds of Lambeth—or was it Kennington? We must have them up."

"But I don't know *when* you are joking," she protested. "Besides, I always understood that the Scotch were not a joking people."

"Ah, you confuse two things. It is said of us, with some justice, that we are slow to comprehend the jokes of others. But of the making of jokes by ourselves there is no end. And—ah, here is Nero. I love Nero!"

"Is that a joke, too?"

"Ah, no," he answered, more seriously. "It is in my nature to love all the people whom history has picked out to condemn. If you knew the sort of creatures who wrote the histories—the old chronicles and records and so on—you would understand my point of view. They were full of all meannesses and

narrow bigotries; they calumniated everybody they couldn't blackmail. Take the case of Richard Lionheart and his brother John, in your own English history. The former was a ferocious and turbulent blackguard, who neglected all his duties of kingship without shame, plundered his own subjects by torture and rapine, and was altogether a curse to his own people and everybody else. The mere trick of his having a taste for songs and music saved him. He buttered up the bards, and they fastened him in history as a hero. It is precisely the same thing that is done now by politicians who take pains to make friends with the newspapers. On the other hand, John was a model monarch, diligent, hard-working, extraordinarily attentive to his duties, travelling for ever up and down the country to hold courts of justice, and right the wrongs poor people suffered at the hands of the barons and the abbots and other powerful ruffians. It is plain enough that the poor people loved him; after all these centuries his name continues to be the most popular baptis-

mal name among them. But the bards and monkish chroniclers were in the pay of the barons and abbots, and they paint John for us as the most evil scoundrel in English history. That's the way it has always been done. I should like to have Nero's side of his story. I know he must have been a splendid fellow, to have got the historians so violently against him. I shouldn't be surprised if he was really almost as fine as Richard the Third."

"How amusing!" said Vestalia at this point, and Mosscrop was swift to take the hint. They moved on through the Greek rooms, where the girl had more of a chance. She had known a few of the students who are accustomed on giving days to offer up sacrifices of time and crayons and good white paper in front of the more fashionable statues, and this had provided her with what seemed to her companion an exhaustive familiarity with Hellenic art. This advantage followed and remained with her amid the sombre and lofty fragments of the Mausoleum, and shone about

her when they confronted the frieze of the Parthenon.

"It is not my subject," he remarked, delightedly. "This is a Hermes, you say, and that a Winged Goddess of Victory. Ah, and this is a River God. I don't think I've ever been here before. It is charming—to come with you. We supplement each other. Sure enough, I ought to have foreseen that you would know about Greek art. It is just the field that would attract a beautiful young woman. It fits you—it belongs to you."

"Now—now!" she admonished him, holding up a finger in playful protest.

"Oh," he urged, "if I'm not to say that you are beautiful, we might as well not have any birthday at all. That is its most elementary fact—lying at the very foundation of everything. To ignore it would be like trying to celebrate the Fifth of November without a guy."

Again she shot a glance of dubiety at him. "I don't know in the least how to take that," she confessed, with a quiver on her lip.

He laughed outright at this, and gaily patted her on the shoulder. "This unnatural Attic levity of mine is all the fault of the frieze. I'm a cat in a strange garret here. Hasten with me to the Assyrian rooms, if you want to see the utmost height of solemnity it is given to mortals to attain."

He was not quite as good as his word, when they began loitering along before the carved tablets from Nineveh and Khorsabad. Instruction he could not help piling upon his companion, for this was *his* subject, but he found himself seasoning it with all sorts of sprightly commentaries on the serious text. Of grave and sportive alike he had so much to say that Vestalia took his arm, and leant upon it as they made their slow progress through the long corridors. The contact was exhilarating to him. He could not be sure that she was assimilating any large proportion of his discourse, but her pretence of interest at least was very pretty, and the touch of her arm in his was full of inspiration to his tongue.

Down in the basement, or crypt, he stood

before the lions of Assur-Banipal, and talked at length. She said she had read Byron's "Sardanapalus," and he told her how those detestable linguists, the Greeks, had altered the name, and how the Assyrian legends of a great warrior and sovereign had become twisted in the Hellenic after-version to depict a sublimation of debauched effeminacy and luxury run mad. She listened with her shoulder against his—but now he had other auditors as well.

"Excuse me, sir," the urgent and anxious voice of a stranger said close behind him, "but you seem to be extraordinarily well posted indeed on these sculptures here. I hope you will not object to my daughter and me standing where we can hear your remarks."

Mosscrop turned, and saw before him an elderly man, with a mild expression, and hair and beard of extreme whiteness. He was soberly attired, and carried in his hand a broad-brimmed hat of woven white straw. He bowed courteously, and indicated by a

gentle gesture the young lady standing at his side.

"I should delight, sir, to have my daughter be privileged to profit by your remarks," he repeated, and bowed again.

The daughter was a dark, well-rounded girl, dressed with much elegance. Her face was strikingly Oriental in type, with coal-black tresses drawn low over the temples, and a skin of a uniform ivory hue. She said nothing, but looked at Vestalia's hair.

Mosscrop spoke somewhat abruptly. "You are certainly welcome, but it happens that I have finished my remarks, as you call them."

"That is too bad," replied the stranger, with a sigh of resignation. "I overheard enough to convince me that they were first-rate. It is our misfortune, sir, mine and my daughter's, to have arrived too late. I presume, sir, that you have given special attention to this branch of study?"

The Professor of Culdees nodded briefly.

"And may I take the liberty of inquiring, sir," the old man persisted, "whether you

are professionally engaged in transmitting to others the knowledge which you have thus acquired?"

A stormy grin began twitching at the corners of Mosscrop's mouth. He nodded again.

"My purpose in putting the question is not one of idle curiosity, sir," the other went on. "My life-long desire to visit Europe, and behold its venerable ruins and its remarkable accumulations of objects of historical and artistic interest, has attained fulfilment at a period, unfortunately, when the burden of my years, while not incapacitating me from the enjoyments of the mind, renders me less capable of searching out new information than I should once have been. It also, I see only too clearly, unfits me to act as a guide and interpreter, amid these treasures of the storied past, to a young mind so much fresher and more eager than my own. I recognise this, sir, frankly, and I should be glad to discuss some possible arrangement, with the proper persons, by which my deficiencies might be supplied in this connection."

The elaborate and deferential courtesy with which the old gentleman spoke made a curt answer impossible. Mosscrop looked from father to daughter with a puzzled smile.

"You are Americans, I take it?"

"We are from Paris, sir." He made haste to add, "From Paris, Kentucky. I obtrude the explanation, because I find that among foreigners there is frequently a tendency to confuse our city with the celebrated metropolis on the Continent, which bears the same name, but is a place of an entirely different character. To a scholar like yourself, however, I might have realised that such an error would be impossible. I ask your pardon, sir."

"Oh, don't mention it," replied Mosscrop, lightly. He could not recall ever having heard of such a place before, and for a moment was tempted to say so. But there was an effect of sweet simplicity in the old man's face and manner which restrained his tongue. "Well," he said instead, "what is it that you wish? I am not sure that I have

entirely caught your idea. Do you want some one to go round with you and show you things?"

"Not in the ordinary meaning which would attach to that description," the other answered. "We do not require to have things shown to us in the literal sense of the word, but I had thought that if we were attended in our inspection of the various objects of interest for which Europe is justly famous, by some person of erudition and also of an exceptional style of delivery, the experience would be of much greater practical value to my daughter. Of course, sir, I am aware that professional assistance of this high character is not to be obtained without commensurate compensation, but that is a consideration which presents no obstacles to my mind."

David felt Vestalia's hand trembling upon his arm.

"I can see," he said, more amiably, "that such a relation might be extremely welcome to many deserving and very capable men. But at the moment I regret to say I can

think of none to recommend to you. Besides, you don't know me from Adam; so how could I give a character to any one else?"

"I beg your pardon sir," rejoined the old gentleman, "but we took the liberty of following close behind you all through the last two long hallways. You were apparently so engrossed with your subject that our proximity escaped your attention, but we have listened with the deepest interest, and I may say improvement as well, to everything which has fallen from your lips. I have thus, sir, been able to form an estimate of your individual characteristics not less than of your acquirements. I may add, sir, that I am especially impressed by the fact that my daughter, from first to last, displayed an exceptional eagerness to miss nothing of your discourse. As the principal object of my visit to Europe, as, indeed, of my whole existence, is to provide the highest forms of intellectual pleasure and edification for my daughter, I cannot close my eyes to the discovery that your remarks upon Assyrian history produced

a much more profound impression upon her young mind than anything which it has been within the scope of my own diminishing powers to produce for her consideration. I have rarely seen her so absorbed, even at our best lectures."

David stifled a yawn, and made a little bow in which, as he turned, he strove to include the young American lady whose culture was the object of so much solicitude. His movement surprised upon her countenance an expression of scornful weariness, which seemed to render the whole face alert and luminous with feeling. At sight of his eyes, her sultana-like features composed themselves again to an almost stolid tranquillity. She regarded him with indolence for an instant, then looked calmly away at things in general. There was to be read in that transient glance a challenge which stirred his blood.

"Well, what you say is, beyond doubt, flattering," he remarked to the father, in a slightly altered voice. "It might be that—that I could find some one for you."

The old gentleman bowed ceremoniously. "Permit me to say, sir, that I have found the some one—a person possessing unique qualifications for the position which I have outlined. I need nothing now but the power to influence his decision in a manner favourable to my aspirations." He turned to Vestalia. "I am emboldened, madame, to crave your assistance in reconciling your husband to my project."

Vestalia's hand fluttered sharply on David's arm, and she parted her lips to speak. At the moment, there was audible a derisive sniff from the daughter.

"It is my rule never to interfere," Vestalia answered with sudden decision, and in a coldly distinct voice. "He is quite capable of settling such matters for himself." She looked from father to daughter and back with an impressive eye.

Mosscrop laughed uneasily. "Well—I'm afraid you must take it that this is settled—I scarcely see my way to avail myself of your very complimentary offer."

The American caught the note of hesitation in his voice. "Perhaps you will turn it over in your mind," he said, fumbling with a hand in his inner breast-pocket. "Allow me, sir, to hand you my card. Adele, you have a pencil? Thank you. I will inscribe upon it the name of the hotel at which we are residing."

Mosscrop took the card, glanced at it, and nodded. "In the extremely improbable event of my changing my mind, I will let you know," he said. "Good day."

As they were parting, the father seemed to read in the daughter's eye that he was forgetting something. He hesitated for a brief space; then his kindly face brightened. "Excuse me, sir," he observed, "but I have neglected to inform myself as to your identity —if I may presume to that extent."

David felt vainly in his pocket. "I haven't a card with me. My name is David Mosscrop. The Barbary Club will find me. I will write it for you."

The old man scrutinized the scrawl in his

note-book, and then, after more bows, led his daughter away. She walked after him in a proudly indifferent fashion, with her head in the air, and something almost like a swagger in the movements of her form.

Mosscrop watched them with a ruminating eye till they had left the room. Then he glanced at the card, and gave a little laugh. "Mr. Laban Skinner, Paris, Kentucky.—Savoy Hotel," he read aloud.

"Skinner? Is their name Skinner?" demanded Vestalia with eagerness.

"None other. Why? It's a good name for them, isn't it?"

"Oh yes—good enough," the girl replied, speaking now with exaggerated nonchalance.

"Quaint people these Americans are!" commented Mosscrop. "If I were to put that old chap's speeches down literally in a book nobody would credit them. Fancy the fate of a young woman condemned to be dragged around the globe chained to a preposterous old phonograph like that! It

really wrings one's heart to think of it. Mighty good-looking girl too."

Vestalia withdrew her arm. "Perhaps," she said, icily, "if you were to make haste you might overtake them. I must insist on your not allowing me to detain you, if you are so interested. I shall do quite well by myself."

Mosscrop gathered her meaning slowly, after a grave scrutiny of her flushed and perturbed face. When it came to him, he shouted his merriment. A glance around the chamber showed him that they were alone with the lions and carved effigies of Sardanapalus. He thrust an arm about Vestalia's waist, and gave it a boisterous though fleeting squeeze.

"Why, you dear little canary-bird of a creature, do you suppose I've been forgetting you?" he cried. "Haven't I been thinking every minute of the touch of your arm in mine? Haven't I been cursing that old windbag ceaselessly because he was interrupting our birthday? Look up at me! Truly now, aren't you ashamed?"

She suffered him to raise her face, his

finger under her chin, and she made a brave effort to smile back at the glance he bent upon her. "If it is truly—oh, ever so truly—still our birthday—the same as it was before," she made wistful answer.

"It is a hundred times more our birthday than ever!" he protested stoutly.

An elderly keeper in uniform shuffled his way into the room.

"Well then," whispered Vestalia, "let's go somewhere else to celebrate the rest of it. All these stone animals and images and mummies —I don't feel as if they brought me luck on my birthday."

So they wandered forth into the sunshine again, and Mosscrop confessed himself glad of the change. Where should they go? He found himself empty of suggestion. Responsibility for the decorous entertainment of a young lady in the daytime was a novel experience, and he said so.

"Oh, let us just stroll about," she urged. "I love these old Bloomsbury Squares. They are so stupid."

Luncheon hour came, and presented itself to Mosscrop as a welcome pretext to take a hansom. A certain formless apprehension of meeting some one he knew—though why this should be dreaded he could not for the life of him have told—had alloyed the pleasure of his ramble. They drove to another restaurant, this time a larger place in a more pretentious quarter—and though they had a little table to themselves, the room was full of others.

David knew about luncheons as well as breakfasts. He gave the waiter very minute instructions about having a grouse split and grilled, and he ran his eye over the list of champagnes with the confident discrimination of an expert. "I will give that number 34A one more trial," he said to the butler. "Cool it to 48, and we will see what it is like then."

Vestalia noted that he spoke to waiters in a soft, grave tone, with shades of gentle melancholy and of affectionate authority subtly blended in it, which he used to no one else. He produced the impression upon her

of being at his very best at a table. She particularly liked him when he took the cork from the butler, and tenderly pinched with thumb and finger as he scrutinised it, and then smiled courteous approbation to the servant. This person wore a chain round his neck, and the bottle he brought was swathed in starched napery—and the girl observed both with the interest that attaches to novelty. But it was even more interesting to see how perfectly her companion presided over everything.

She herself was much less at ease. David noticed that she kept her hands in her lap under the table as much as possible during the meal, and that there was an air of constraint in her general deportment which had been lacking at breakfast. He put it down to her shyness among so many busy people in the thronged apartment, and talked briskly at intervals to re-assure her. Especially he charged himself with the duty of keeping her glass filled, and he was almost peremptory in his tone with her about the grouse. She ate

her piece to the end with meek resolution after that.

When they were again in the open, he rallied her upon the diffidence she had displayed. "You mustn't mind a lot of fellows being about," he said in a paternal way. "They go where there is the best kitchen, and it's the part of wisdom to go there too; besides, they're only too pleased to see a pretty face among them. Didn't you feel how proud I was of you, all the while?"

Outside she had quite regained her spirits and assurance. She smiled with frank gaiety at him. "I'll tell you how to be prouder still," she said. "I know you won't mind my saying so—but I ought really to have some gloves."

"I'm a brute not to have thought of it," Mosscrop reproached himself. "Here's a place, just at hand. I can come in, this time, I suppose, without question."

She held up a finger at him, in mock monition. Then, as they turned to enter the shop, she whispered: "I saw that American

girl looking with all her eyes at my bare hands."

"Oh, pshaw—lots of women don't wear gloves. You mustn't be so suspicious of everybody that looks your way. A hundred to one they're thinking about themselves all the time."

"Ah, but you don't know women," she halted midway in the entrance to murmur. "I could read it in her eyes that she'd noticed I had no ring."

"Well, and there too," protested Mosscrop, "you exaggerate the importance of the thing. Lots of women don't wear rings, either—that is, on ordinary occasions."

She danced her eyes at him in merriment. "Perhaps you didn't notice that I was supposed to be a married lady," she said, and then turned abruptly to the counter.

CHAPTER V.

"Ah me! Even the longest and happiest day must have an ending!" sighed Vestalia.

"It is not a new thought," replied David. "But I have never before comprehended how unwelcome it could make itself."

They spoke to each other in soft, regretful, musing tones, through the still darkness of the clouded summer night. They had been the last to quit the Greenwich boat, on its last return to its City moorings, and they halted for a moment on the floating pier after the others had gone—the gentle undulation of the tide beneath their feet, their gaze dwelling upon the black silent expanse of the river.

In retrospect, the day had been very long indeed, and altogether happy. Its structure of delight had been reared on the simplest and

most innocent of foundations. They had gone first to the Zoölogical Garden, which fortuitously suggested itself to Mosscrop's mental search as an unexceptional resource. Nor did inspiration fail him there, for when the great man-eating cats had been fed, and the foul hyenas next door had yelped themselves hoarse, and the charms of natural history had otherwise begun to wane, the notable thought of the fish dinner at Greenwich rose with splendid opportuneness in his mind.

It was after this feast, while the two strolled beneath the big trees, that twilight found them out. The shadows, as they deepened among the distant shipping, and stole downward to dim the reflected whiteness of the eastern sky beyond the river, brought reverie in their train. Mosscrop found a bitter taste in his cigar, and lit another impatiently. The girl leant upon his arm with a new suggestion of dependence. They moved down to the wharf by tacit consent, before the appointed time, and, taking their seat on a bench at the end, looked absently at the water with

but an occasional word. Evening closed in about them as they sat thus. Then the boat came, and they went on board, and established themselves in relative seclusion at the stern, still in almost unbroken silence.

And now the completed journey lay behind them as well. They stood close together, swaying with the slight motion of the raft upon the lapping waters, and ruminating sadly upon the fact that their day was done.

"We finish as we began—with the river," murmured Vestalia. She trembled to his touch as she spoke.

"Do you remember Henley's lines," said David, meditatively—

> "'The smell of ships (that earnest of romance),
> A sense of space and water, and thereby
> A lamplit bridge ouching the troubled sky,
> And look, O look! a tangle of silvery gleams,
> And dusky lights, our River and all his dreams,
> His dreams of a dead past that cannot die.'"

"No, it cannot die," said Vestalia, slowly. "But its burial time is close at hand, none the less. Ah, the beautiful day!"

They turned and paced up the ascent, and then through obscure, deserted thoroughfares made their way at length to the open space about St. Paul's. The clouds had parted, and the great dome loomed in immensity against a straggling light from the sky. They paused to look at it, and while they stood the fleecy mists far overhead cleared away, and the round moon's full radiance flooded the prospect. Mosscrop gazed up at the flaring satellite, then down at his companion. A new thought sparkled in his eyes.

"And ah, the beautiful to-morrow, too!" he said, confidently. "My good child, do you conceive that the world comes to an end when the sun goes down? Am I less your friend by moonlight than I was in the day-time? Are we changed by the fact that the lamps are lit?"

Vestalia turned her face into the shadow, and said nothing. Mosscrop felt her deep breathing against his arm.

"You have been very dutiful and obedient all day," he began, as they moved along to-

ward Ludgate Hill. "I repudiate the suggestion that you are capable of mutiny now. Let us speak plainly, dear little lady. How can you suppose that, having watched over you all day and gladly made myself responsible for your well-being since before breakfast, I could wash my hands of you now, and calmly say 'good-bye' at a street corner?"

"You have been very *very* kind," faltered Vestalia.

"And for that reason it follows that I should be very callous and brutal now, does it? I don't see the logic myself."

"I haven't meant that at all," she interposed in a low voice. She bent her head so that Mosscrop could not see her face.

"We will develop and analyze your meanings at our leisure," he said, with a note of authority. "It is more important for the moment to make clear what *I* mean. The facts are simplicity itself. You have no home, no belongings, no place to sleep, no knowledge of where the morning's breakfast is to come from. You are a beautiful girl, and it is true

our civilisation is so arranged that beautiful girls rarely starve to death. I do not recall having heard of a single instance, for that matter. But your position makes an imperative demand for assistance from somebody. It cried aloud for help at an early hour this morning. It happened that the appeal was heard and answered. If we were superstitious, we should call it providential."

"Oh, but I do!" protested the girl.

"Very well, then, we *are* superstitious, and it *was* providential. These things are governed, I am informed, by immutable laws. Ergo, it is still providential. Who are we, that we should fly in the face of Providence? I adjure you to put away such impious thoughts!"

A little sobbing catch of the breath was her only answer. He divined that there were tears in her eyes, and slowed his pace as they walked along in the gloom of the deserted descent. At the bottom, under the bridge, the sparkling lights of Fleet Street recalled to him that shops were still open.

"I mentioned that you had no belongings," he resumed, after they had traversed the Circus in silence. "There are little odds and ends of things that you want—the necessities of the toilet, *et cetera.* Here is a shop; take this sovereign and get the bits of haberdashery that occur to you—such as a lady would put in her dressing-bag if she were to stop overnight in the country. I will go across the way and get the bag itself, and come back for you."

He performed his part of the enterprise with an almost childlike delight. Ladies' dressing-bags cost more than he had imagined, but the shopman said he would take a cheque. David found something to his mind —a dainty yet capacious trifle, with pretty silver flasks ranged on one side, and a surprisingly comprehensive collection of small implements—scissors, curling-tongs, a manicure set, and other tools the significance of which he could not even guess—packed about in quaint little pockets and crevices. The outer leather was rich to the eye and delicate to the touch.

A few doors away shone the symbolical red and blue lights of a chemist. Hurrying thither, he flung himself eagerly into the task of buying fluids to fill those imposing flasks. The shopman advised him, at first coldly, then with rising enthusiasm. The best perfumes and vinaigres were expensive, certainly, but then they *were* the best, and would vouch for themselves to any cultivated feminine mind. There were recondite soaps, and cosmetics to thrill any gentle heart. And in the matter of brushes—here were some silver-backed, and the comb also—to match the flasks. So the list was filled out, and David wrote another cheque with a proud smile.

Vestalia stood at the door of the shop, waiting with a small paper parcel in her hands. Mosscrop was disappointed at its size, and thrust it into the bag with a disdainful shove. They strolled on up the street, and he looked into every lighted window with a hopeful eye. The display of mere masculine or neutral wares affronted him. The shopping fantasy possessed his soul.

"But you really ought to have them. You're not behaving nicely to me in continually saying 'no,'" he urged more than once, as the pressure of his companion's arm drew him away from the tempting windows. She did consent at last to the purchase of some slippers—and he saw to it that they were the choicest that the shelves afforded—soft, luxurious little things, with satin linings and buckles of mother-of-pearl. When these went into the bag, it was filled. He recognised the fact with a regretful sigh.

The creaking old clock-machinery in the belfry of St. Clement Danes set itself in motion as they passed, and the ancient chimes clanged out the full hour. It was nine o'clock.

"I had some thought of a music-hall," he remarked. "But we've had a pretty full day—and a long day, too. I know you must be tired."

"Perhaps—just a little," she answered, softly.

"Then we'll go home," he said, with decision.

It was not a part of London which Vestalia knew very well. Mosscrop led her along the Strand for a little way, then crossed and went up a side street, then turned into a still narrower by-way. The ragged loungers on the walk had an evil aspect, and almost every building seemed to be a public-house. At the last corner a piano-organ of unusual volume shook the air with deafening mechanical din. The man turned the crank so fast, and the dancing children in the radiance from the open-doored tavern on the pavement raised such a racket of their own, that she could barely distinguish the movement of the vulgar tune. On the borders of darkness beyond were discernible still other children, playing noisily about at the base of groups of fat women in fog-coloured shawls and white aprons. Over all the tumult and squalid clusterings of humanity there brooded the acrid, musty stench of an antique mid-London slum.

The two turned under an archway, and as by magic the atmosphere freshened and the hubbub ceased. A small square of venerable

buildings disclosed itself vaguely in the uncertain light from the sky. Here and there a lamp behind some curtained window made a dim break in the obscurity. The faint sweet moaning of a 'cello rose from somewhere at the farther end of the space. A stout man with a gold band upon his tall hat revealed himself for a noiseless moment, lifted his finger in salute to Mosscrop, and melted away again into the shadows. Whether they had passed him, or he them, Vestalia could hardly tell. It was all very strange—and a little sombre. A streak of moonlight glanced down between shifting clouds, and fell across the fronts of the houses opposite. There were pale grey tablets of ornamentation set into their mass of dusky brickwork, which looked like tombstones. The girl trembled, and hung back upon Mosscrop's arm as if to halt.

Suddenly, after a brief preliminary scale of piano notes, a woman's clear, practised voice fell upon the silence in a song—a grave and simple melody full of tenderness. They paused to listen for an instant, and

Vestalia traced the sound to an illuminated upper floor at the end of the square.

"Then people live here!" she said, with hesitating re-assurance in her voice.

"Bless you, yes," replied David. "*We* live here, among others."

He entered the open doorway of the house next to that before which they had paused. The hall was lighted by a single gas-jet at the rear, which only deepened the darkness of the narrow staircase up which he led the way. It was a very ancient and ricketty staircase, with steps worn into queer bumps and hollows by generations of feet. There was not room for her to walk abreast of her guide. He strode ahead, striking matches on the wall as he went. She followed him timorously up the winding ascent, noting the rows of names painted on the big closed doors of each landing they passed.

Mosscrop stopped only when the stairs came to an end. He put down the bag, and she heard the rattle of a key in a lock. Then a match was struck, and a sudden flare of

gas lit up the small square hall-way they stood in.

As he pushed open a door to the left, he turned with a smiling face towards his companion. He discovered her drawn back at the edge of the stairs, her hands pressed against her bosom. Her eyes were fastened on him with a troubled look, and the sound of her breathing, quick and laboured, reached his ears.

"These stairs are the very deuce when you're not used to them," he said, pleasantly. "I oughtn't to have rushed you up them at such a pace."

"*That* doesn't matter," panted the girl. "It is I who onghtn't to have come up at all."

David's smile deepened and mellowed as he regarded her. "My dear Vestalia," he began, laying a slight and kindly stress upon this first use of her name, "you speak hastily. You must offer no further remarks until you have quite recovered your breath. I will employ the interval by calling your attention to

the inscription on the closed door, there, opposite to mine. You will observe that it is 'Mr. Linkhaw.' Have you ever heard it before?"

She shook her head.

"And are you conscious of no novel emotions at hearing it now? Does not the sight of those painted letters cause you to thrill with strange and mysterious sensations? No? What becomes then of the boasted intuition of the feminine mind?"

There seemed to be a jest hidden somewhere in all this, and she smiled plaintively, dubiously. She took her hand from her breast, to show that her breathing was calmer.

"You really assure me," he went on, with a twinkling eye, "that the spectacle of this particular sported-oak does not especially stir your pulses, and peculiarly impress your imagination?"

"Why should it?"

"Why indeed! Ah, young woman, your sex gets much credit that it ill deserves. A mere man could do no worse in the matter of

instinct. My dear friend, behind that door lies your present abode. That name 'Linkhaw' is the sign of your home—and you looked at them both and never guessed it!"

Vestalia did not so much as glance at the door in question, but she gazed with much intentness at Mosscrop. "I don't understand—what it is all about?" she said, slowly.

He had stepped inside his own door, lighted the gas and pulled down the blinds. He returned, and stretched out his hand to take hers. "Do me the honour to come in and sit down," he said, holding up her gloved fingers, and bowing over them. "You are my nearest neighbour, and yet you have never called upon me."

She followed him into his sitting-room, and took the easy chair he wheeled out toward the table for her. It was a larger apartment than the narrow staircase and cramped landing had promised. The ceiling was low and dreadfully smoky, it was true, and the appointments and furniture were old-fashioned. But

the whole effect, if somewhat meagre and unadorned, was comfortable and honest.

"Put off your hat and gloves, and look as if you felt at home," urged David. "You've but a step to go."

He busied himself meanwhile in bringing from a recess of the sideboard two tumblers, a heavy decanter filled with an amber liquid, and a big bottle of soda water.

"You'll join me in some whisky and soda?" he asked pleasantly, fumbling with the wire.

"Oh mercy, no!" said Vestalia. "Really I mustn't touch anything more. I see now that I have been drinking far too much, all day long."

"Tut!" he answered. "How could there be too much on a birthday? And now I think of it, there were two of them! I pledge my word, it has been a singularly dry occasion for a double birthday. We must hasten to make good the deficiency."

Vestalia had drawn off her gloves. She rose now, and standing before the mantel-mir-

ror, lifted her hat from her head. Then she turned and, half-playfully, half in pleading, shook her bright curls at him. "I thought it was going to be different hereafter," she said, softly.

He looked inquiry for an instant, then nodded comprehension. "Ay," he said, with gravity, "you're a wise virgin. This one glass shall last me the night. You are very welcome here, my lady!"

She smiled at the lifted tumbler, over which his eyes regarded her. "What lots of books you have!" she exclaimed, a moment later, and began an inspection of the room, lingering in turn before each of the old prints on the dingy walls, and examining the rows of volumes in detail. He loitered beside her for a little, passing comments on what seemed to interest her. Then he disappeared in an adjoining room, and returned presently in a loose velveteen jacket and slippers. He took the famous dressing-bag from the table.

"Your visit isn't at all over yet," he remarked; "but I am consumed with a desire to

see you sitting opposite me, here, in those wee soft slippers of yours. It will make a sweet picture for me to carry into dreamland. And so first I will show you your new home."

She followed him out into the hall, and then through the doors he unlocked into the apartments of the mysterious "Mr. Linkhaw." The first room disclosed itself, when the gas was lit, to be similar to David's in size, but all else was strangely different. The Turkey red carpet was brilliant, almost garish, in its newness, and the ceiling was covered with a bright pink paper. All round three sides were broad divans, heaped with soft red cushions and downy pillows. No chairs were to be seen. More singular still, the walls were crowded with the stuffed heads of animals—bisons, bears, moose, elks, antelopes, wolves, and endless varieties of deer. Vestalia gazed at these trophies of the chase with surprise.

"Linkhaw is a mighty hunter before the Lord," Mosscrop explained. "Yon is the bedroom. It is fairly carpeted with the skins of tigers, lions, leopards, and such like beasts. If

you dream of jungles and Noah's ark to-night, and don't like it, we'll throw them all out in the morning."

"But what am I doing in this Mr. Linkhaw's rooms?" inquired the girl. "I don't understand it at all. Suppose he should come?"

David laughed lightly. "It's a far cry from Uganda to Dunstan's Inn. Or maybe he's in the Hudson Bay Territory. It's a year and more since I knew of his whereabouts. The most unheard-of and God-forgotten wilderness on earth—that's where you may always count on his being, unless he has learned of some still more impossible and repellent wild, just discovered, in the meantime. He is an old friend and school-fellow of mine, and leaves his keys with me. I just have a look at the place now and then, to keep the laundress up to the mark."

He passed on into the bedroom, struck a light, and threw a scrutinising glance round. "You'll be needing fresh sheets and the like," he said, returning. "I'll bring them."

He came back with an armful of linen, and heaped it on the bed. "Now you're right as a trivet," he cried, cheerily. "Everything has been aired. And now I'll be waiting for you to come back to me, with the pretty little slippers. Mind, I'm capable of great excesses in drink if you delay over-long."

Vestalia's delay was inconsiderable. They sat for an hour or more, she with the dainty new footgear on the fender, he, lounging low in his chair, stretching out his own feet close to the rail beside hers. "I could wish it were winter," he mused, once, "so that we might have a fire. We have an old saying about two pairs of slippers on the hearth. I never thought before what homely beauty there was in it. Ah, there'll be cool nights coming on now, and then we'll start a blaze. But even with a black grate, it is the dearest evening of my life."

"And of mine," responded the girl.

Hours later, David still sat by the empty fireplace, and ruminated over his pipe. He had put the decanter and glass resolutely back

into the sideboard, and turned a key on them. He had taken down a book, but it lay unregarded on the floor beside him. He desired to do nothing but think, and yet even that it was not easy to contrive. Thoughts would not marshal themselves in any ordered sequence.

The whole day had yielded an extraordinary experience, involving all thoughts of momentous possibilities, which he said over and over again to himself demanded the coolest and most conservative consideration. But when he strove to fasten his mind to the task, straightway it swerved and curveted and danced off beyond control. One memory returned to him ceaselessly: the way Vestalia had risen finally to say good-night, and insisted strenuously on his not quitting his chair, and then, all at once, had bent swiftly down and kissed him before she ran from the room. And well, why not? he asked himself at last; why shouldn't he abandon himself to remembering it? What else was there equally well worth recalling? The early morning on the bridge rose again before him; the tenderly

compassionate intimacy which, stealing slowly over them, seemed yet to have burst forth in ripe fulness from the very beginning; the delightful meals together, the long walks and talks, the little gifts which brought such happiness to the donor; the languorously saddened twilight on the river, the silent homecoming, the surprise, the kiss—so the sweet chain of reverie coiled and unfolded itself, with quickened heart-beats for links.

Once a thought came to him—a thought which seemed hard and cold as his native granite, and rough with the bristling spikes of his own hillside heather—that he had spent in that one day more than his whole week's income. In other times the fact would have disturbed David. Now he looked it calmly in the face, and smiled at it derisive dismissal. The savings of a year, or of four years—what were even they when weighed in the balance against the fact that next door, under these very roof-beams, the dear Vestalia was peacefully sleeping?

It must have been long after midnight

when, in the act of filling his pipe once more, it occurred to him to go to bed instead. Upon reflection, he was both tired and sleepy. He rose and yawned, and then smiled upon his own image in the mirror at remembering how happy he was as well. It was a queer mess, to be sure, but there was no element in it which he regretted or would have changed. It was all delicious, through and through.

As he glanced again at his reflection in the glass, and warmed his heart by the flame of triumphant joy which gleamed through the eyes he looked into, a sudden rhythmical noise rose upon the profound stillness of the old inn. It caught his ear, and he turned to listen.

"It is that blessed creature snoring—breathing, I mean," was his first thought. But no, it was in too rapid a measure for that. Then the sound waxed louder, and he recognised that it was of footsteps steadily ascending the stairs. "The watchman, coming to make sure of the lights," he thought, with re-assurance.

But this hypothesis fell to the ground also.

The footsteps mounted to the landing close outside. The noise ceased, and then there came the unmistakable jingle of a key—nay, the very grating of it in the lock of the door opposite.

David's veins, for a confused moment, ran cold. Then, with an excited ejaculation, he ran to his door, and flung it open.

"Stop that, you idiot!" he commanded, in muffled but ferocious tones.

"Ah, Davie, Davie! Still at the bottle!" replied a well-known voice from out of the obscurity.

CHAPTER VI.

Mosscrop groaned at recognition of the voice in the dark.

"Of all inopportune creatures in the animal kingdom!" he bewailed under his breath. "Sh! for Heaven's sake, man, don't talk so loud. Come inside here, and walk softly."

"What is it you're stalking, Davie—snakes?" queried the newcomer, with obvious sarcasm. But he lowered his voice, and came forward into David's room. The latter closed the door noiselessly, and drew a long sigh of consolation. The two men looked at each other for a minute in silence.

"You don't mean that there are burglars in the house?" asked the intruder. A gleam of hopeful light shone in his eyes as he spoke, then died down at David's shake of the head.

The Earl of Drumpipes, in the peerage of Scotland, was a year younger than his friend the Culdee Professor. The gaslight revealed him now to be a tall, burly, rubicund man, with a broad, strongly-marked face of a severe aspect. His yellowish hair was cut close over a head which seemed unduly large for even his powerful frame, and was thinning towards baldness on the top. The collar of a woollen shirt showed a good deal of his thick neck, burnt a bright red at the back by a fiercer sun than warms these British islands. His prominent blue eyes bulged forth more than ever, now, in mystified inspection of David's countenance. While he still gazed, it occurred to him to hold out his hand, as mighty as a blacksmith's, in perfunctory greeting, and David took it with an effusiveness which was novel to them both.

"I'm really delighted to see you, Archie. I give you my word I am!" he protested, eagerly.

"You have your own way of showing it," growled the other. "Yet you seem sober enough. What ails you, man?"

"Oh, the strangest story!" said David. "Sit down here, and I'll get out the whisky." He busied himself between the sideboard and table, talking as he did so, while the other sprawled his large bulk in one of the easy chairs and lit a pipe.

"See here, Drumpipes, damn it all," he began, "I'm a gentleman, am I not?"

"You are a professional man, a person of education," the Earl assented, cautiously.

"Well, this is the first day in long years that I have felt like a gentleman."

"You were ever a bit susceptible to hallucinations, Davie," said the other. "There's a streak of unreality in your nature. Hold there! Not so much soda. I'm sore in need of a bath, I know; but everything at its proper time. Well, go on—how are you accounting for this extraordinary occurrence? You've felt all day like a gentleman! It arouses my curiosity."

"Chuck that, Archie, or you'll hear nothing at all."

"Very well, my boy. I'll just drink this,

then, and go to my bed. It will be welcome, I can tell you."

He drained the tumbler, and made as if to rise. David hurled himself forward with a restraining arm. "Don't be an ass, old man! I've told you once, you mustn't go near your place to-night," he urged petulantly. "I'll give you my bed, and I'll sleep on the sofa here. It's all right, I assure you. If you must know, there is somebody sleeping in your room."

The Earl frowned up at his friend. "That was not in the bargain, Mosscrop," he said, with sharpness. "I don't like it."

"All I can say is," retorted David, "that if you'd been in my place you'd have done the same thing—or no, I'm not so sure about that; but under the circumstances it was the only thing *I* could do. It's a young lady who is occupying your room, Drumpipes."

"Aha!" cried the Earl, "let's have her out! I'm not so sleepy as I thought. You can do something in the way of a supper, can't you?"

"No, I can't, and if I could I wouldn't. You misapprehend the situation entirely, my friend. This is a poor girl who——" and David went on and told, in brief fashion, the story of the day.

"Nine pounds odd your whistle cost you, eh, Davie?" was the listener's comment, at the conclusion of the narrative. "Well, each man has his own notion of what he wants for his money. It is not mine, I'll say frankly. And what's the programme for to-morrow? South Kensington Museum and Hampton Court? The next day you might do the Tower and Epping Forest. Then Westminster Abbey and Richmond—but you'll come soon to the end of your rope. And sooner, still, I'm thinking, to the end of your banking account."

"That's my affair," returned Mosscrop, testily.

"I might be said to have some small concern in the matter," Drumpipes observed, "seeing that I provide furnished lodgings for this beautiful experiment in combined philan-

thropy and instruction. But you're drinking nothing."

"No; I had my one glass before you came. I'm taking care of myself these days."

"And high time, too!" admitted the candid friend. "I'll not say you'll not be the better for it."

"Well, and don't you see?" urged Mosscrop, with earnestness, "it's just the fact of her being there yonder that makes it seem worth while to go to bed sober. It alters my whole conception of myself. It gives me entirely new ideas of what I ought to do. So long as I led this solitary life here there was nothing for me but to drink. But it's different now."

The Earl grinned. "And how long will you be content to have this improving influence radiated to you from across the passage?" he asked, with cynicism. "Supposing, of course, that I give up my rooms to the reform-dynamo, so to speak."

"Oh, of course, no one is asking that of

you. Obviously, your return makes other arrangements imperative."

"What will the other arrangements be like?"

"That remains to be seen. But I'm quite clear about one thing. I will not turn back from what I have undertaken. She shall not know what want is, and she shall be respected. I swear that, Drumpipes; and I want you to remember it."

"Oh, I respect her immensely already," said the Earl. "By George, a girl must possess extraordinary qualities who can come out early and catch a Professor of Culdees off her own bat, and work him for a tenner, and then leave him to forswear whisky on one side of a passage while she sleeps the sleep of the just in borrowed apartments on the other. It's really splendid, old man. I take off my hat to her."

"Archie," remarked David, slowly, "I'm smaller than you are, and no athlete, God knows; but if we have any more of that I will hit you in the eye, and chance it."

Drumpipes was amused at the notion, and chuckled. Then his face and voice lapsed into solemnity. "Davie," he said, "I've no wish to vex you, but it's a bad business. You'll not win your way through without much expense and soreness of heart. You can take that from me, who should know if any man does."

Mosscrop accepted the portentous gravity of the tone in good faith. He nodded, as he looked hard at his friend. "Ay, I know," he said, softly. "But I have no despair, and few doubts about it all, Archie. I am very happy in the thought of going forward with it; so happy that I see I never knew what happiness meant before. And if—we'll put it at the worst possible—if disappointment should come out of it, why, I shall already have had the joy. And even if it broke me, what would it matter? I should only be back again where I was yesterday, and no one on earth would be the worse for that. But with you it was different."

The Earl nodded in turn, and smoked his

pipe. At last, without lifting his voice or disclosing special interest in his news, he said, "Man, she's dead."

David's eyes dilated. "What's that—she—your wife, do you mean, is dead?"

"Ay, four months since," replied the other quietly.

Mosscrop came over and shook hands with his friend. "I *will* take a drink with you, after that," he said, and filled a glass. "Tell me about it."

"I know nothing about it—except that she is dead. That is enough, quite enough." He lifted his tumbler. "Here's to the heating arrangements in the warmest corner down below."

"A foul cat!" said David, with a harsh tremor in his voice, sipping the toast.

"A very pretty woman," answered the Earl, musingly. "Hair like a new primrose, face like an earl Christian martyr, dearest little feet you ever imagined. You never saw her. You would have wanted to die for her on the spot. She would have made a single

bite of you, my friend. I was a good deal tougher mouthful, but I got mangled more or less in the operation. These are the things that make one grateful for the religious influences of childhood. I should be downhearted just now if I were not able to believe in a Hell."

"There is no doubt about the thing—she is really dead?"

"Dead as a mackerel, thank God. My lawyers certify to the blessed event. They ought to know. They have stood in the breach for four years, warding off writs, injunctions, mandamuses, and appeals, with which she and the unscrupulous scoundrels, her solicitors, bombarded them. The costs those ancient parties must have charged up against me! Man, I'm fair frightened to go into the City and face them. There are three attempts at judicial separation, one divorce suit, two petitions for restoration of conjugal rights, three examinations of witnesses by commission, four appeals—the thought of those bills sickens me, Davie."

"You're well out of the noose at any cost."

"Well, then, if your neck is free, keep it so, man!"

David smiled with gentle self-assurance.

"Ah, laddie, if you could have seen the innocence of her. She drank Capri at breakfast, and then champagne at luncheon, and more of the same at dinner, with old tawny port on top of it—all as trustingly and confidingly as a babe. It softened one's heart to see her lack of guile, her pretty inexperience."

The Earl sniffed audibly. "Oh, ay, it's a beautiful spectacle, no doubt, and very touching. The pity is that magistrates will not always view it in that light next morning. But then so many things look different in the morning."

Again Mosscrop smiled. "Save your moans, Archie," he advised, "till you see her yourself. You'll meet the lady at breakfast."

"I'm damned if I do," said Drumpipes.

"Now then, you're talking like an idiot. You, a hunter of lions and crocodiles and

wild asses of the desert, to turn tail and run from one wee yellow-headed lassie! and desert an old friend, moreover, who needs your advice and judgment in the most important matter of his life! You know you're flatly incapable of it."

"I'll not promise to be civil to her if I stop," the other growled. "The mere thought of yellow-haired women is nauseating to me. Why on earth, man, if you must make a stark-staring lunatic of yourself, could you not hit on a decent and reputable colour?"

"Never a dye has touched it," protested David. "It's as natural as the sunshine—and as radiant."

"Then you're a ruined man, Davie," the Earl gravely declared, between puffs at his pipe. "There may be some saving quality in a woman who merely dyes her hair. An honest nature may persist beneath the painted wig, in spite of her endeavours. But if she's a tortoise-shell tabby born, then you might better be dead than sitting there mooning about her. I give you up as a lost creature!"

"Then all the more reason you should help me to cook a fine breakfast, to confront my doom upon," replied Mosscrop, lightly. "I didn't quite promise that I'd call her in time to assist. It will be more of a surprise to have it all ready, spread in her honour, when she comes in. What do you think of soft roes grilled on toast, eh? You can get them in tins. And some little lamb cutlets—or perhaps venison—and then some eggs *Bercy*—you do those fit for a queen, and we might have——"

"The truth is," put in the other, reflectively, "that black is the only wholly satisfying hair for a woman. The intervening compromises—all the browns and chestnuts and reds and auburns—are a delusion. I see that very clearly now. Give me the hair that throws a purplish shadow, glossy and thick and growing well down upon the forehead, and then a straight-nosed face, wide between the eyes and rounded under the chin, and a complexion of a soft, pale olive. There's nothing else worth talking about."

"I *had* thought of those small Italian sausages, but I don't know that in hot weather they——"

"Oh rot!" said the nobleman. "Who wants to talk about muffins and ham fat at this time of night? Have you no poetry in you, man? There was a divine creature on the steamer coming over—great eyes like a sloe, and the face of a Circassian princess, calm, regal, languid, yet with depths of passion underneath that seemed to call out to you to risk your immortal soul for the sake of drowning in them——"

"My word, here *is* cheek, if you like!" burst in Mosscrop, stormily. "You won't let me talk about *my* girl at all; you sneer and gibe and croak evil suspicions, and make a general nuisance of yourself at the least mention of her—and then you suppose I'm going to sit patiently and listen to such blithering twaddle as this. Damn it all, a man's got some rights in his own room!"

"I'm told not," commented the Earl, grimly.

"Now, why hark back to that?" demanded David, with a show of petulance. "It's all settled and done with, hours ago. But what I was saying was, it isn't the decent thing for you to—to obtrude talk of that sort just to throw ridicule on a subject that I feel very keen about."

Drumpipes yauned frankly. "It's time you turned in, Davie," he remarked. "The lack of sleep aye makes you silly. I've no wish to ridicule your subject, as you call her. It's not at all necessary. You'll see for yourself how ridiculous it is in the morning. It merely occurred to me that if we must talk of women, I'd something in my mind worth the while—no strolling yellow-headed vagrant picked up at random on a bridge, but a gentlewoman in education and means and manners. Man, you should see her teeth when she smiles!"

"Archie," replied David, solemnly, "I should think your own better instincts might prompt you to recall that you've only been a widower four months."

"Four months?—Four hundred years!" cried the Earl, stoutly. He reached round and replenished his glass. "It is with the greatest difficulty that I recall any detail of the matrimonial state. Already the memory of my first pair of breeks is infinitely fresher to me than any of it. In another week or so the last vestige of a recollection of it will be clean gone. And a good riddance, too!"

"It was an ill thought to remind you of it," admitted Mosscrop. "Devil take all women—or all but one——"

"And she black-haired," interposed the Earl.

"Deuce seize them all but two, then, for the rest of the night. Where have you been the long year-and-a-half, Archie?"

"Just looking about me," replied the other, with nonchalance. "Bechuanaland for a time, but it's sore overrated. Then I had a shy at the Gaboon country, but there's a conspiracy among the niggers to protect the gorilla—I think he's a sort of uncle of theirs—and a white man can do no good by himself.

I thought there might be some decent sport over in Brazil, where they advertised a revolution on, and I tried to travel around with the rebels for a while, but it wasn't up to much. You brought down an occasional half-breed Portugueser with epaulettes on, but you couldn't eat 'em, and you didn't want 'em stuffed at any price; and besides, when you came to find out, the whole war was merely a fight between two firms of coffee-traders in New York, and that wasn't good enough. I tell you what, though," he went on, with more animation, "Arizona is damned good fun. I haven't seen anything better anywhere than a good, square cattle-lifter hunt. They got up three or four, just on my account, I imagine, after they found I could ride, and shoot at a gallop. The charm of the thing is that there's no close season for cattle-thieves, and they're game to the death, I tell you. I got potted twice, and once they let daylight straight through me. I had to lie up for repairs for nearly three weeks. They went and hung the fellow while I was in bed. We had words

about that. I insisted it wasn't sportsmanlike —and that they ought to have given him a horse, and then sprung him out of a trap or something of that sort, and let him have a run for his money, the same as we do with rabbits that the ferrets bring up. But they couldn't see it, and so I turned it up and came North. They'll ruin the whole thing, though, if they don't chuck that foolish hanging business. The first thing they know, everybody'll stop running off cattle, just as a protest, and then their place won't be worth living in. It'll be a pity, because a cow-boy gone wrong is really the best thing there is. He's as good as a Bengal tiger and a Russian wolf together, with a grizzly bear thrown in. You may quote me as saying so."

"I shall not fail to do so," said David. "Come, drink up your liquor, and we'll toddle. I'm fair glad to see you back whole and sound, laddie—and more still, a free man."

He brought forth from the bedroom a pillow and some blankets, and began arrang-

ing them upon the sofa. "And are the Americans so daft about lords and titles as they're made out?" he asked as he worked. "Did they humble themselves before the handle to your name?"

Drumpipes sat up. "Do you suppose I'm such an abandoned ass as to travel with a title?" he demanded. "Man, if you knew what it cost me, even without it, it would turn your hair grey. Ten dollars here, twenty dollars there, seven dollars and a-half somewhere else—one steady and endless drain on the purse, till the marvel is I was able to get out at all! And there's no third-class on the railways whatever. It's just terrible, Davie! And as ill-luck would have it, I couldn't even come home steerage on the steamer. There were passengers that I knew in the first cabin, and so I had to throw away more money there. And I'm not like you—I've no ten-pound notes to spare for my day's amusement."

"No, you're not like me," responded Mosscrop, in no sympathetic tone. "I have my

magnificent £432 per annum, which is over eight guineas a week. And you—you have only a paltry four thousand odd, not more than ten times as much. I wonder you've kept off the rates so long, Archie."

"Ah, I know all that," protested the Earl. "But you have no damned position to keep up. You must remember that, Davie, It's a very important fact. It makes all the difference in the world."

"But you only keep it up in your own mind, and that's not an expensive place. There's been no year since I first knew you, either as Master of Linkhaw or since you came into the whole of it, that you've spent the half of your income. To hear you talk, one would think you'd been scattering your capital as well with both hands."

"Ah, but those lawyers' bills, Davie! What think you now should they be like? Six hundred, eh? Or may be seven?"

"You'll know soon enough. I'll not encourage you to pass a sleepless night. Come now. You've got things in your bag here,

haven't you? I can let you have whatever you lack."

"No, you keep your bed. I'll sleep out here," said Drumpipes. "I'm a deal more used to roughing it than you are. I give you my word, I shall sleep here like a top."

Mosscrop strove to resist, but his friend was resolute, and the sofa had to be surrendered to him. He rose, yawning, and began to throw off his outer garments. "I've paid as high as eleven shillings for a bedroom for one night in New York city!" he affirmed, drowsily, "although, to give the Devil his due, they make no charge for candles and soap. Man, if they'd known I was an Earl, they'd have lifted all seven of my skins."

"Oh, but they have a reputation for acumen," urged Mosscrop, drily. "They'd have comprehended fine that you were but a Scotch Earl. Good night!"

The broad daylight woke David up nearly an hour later than it should have done. He had produced upon himself during the night an impression of sleeping very little—and that

a light and dainty slumber, ready and eager on the instant of need to dissolve into utter wakefulness. Yet it was the fact, none the less, that he had ingloriously overslept himself. The watch on his table pointed to half-past eight.

He hurriedly drew on some of his garments, and stepped into the sitting-room to rouse the Earl. To his great surprise that nobleman had disappeared. The tumbled bed-clothes showed where he had slept. There was his hand-bag, duly packed and closed, at the foot of the sofa.

Reasoning that Drumpipes had not promised to breakfast, and was a perverse creature anyway, and probably had been worried by early brooding over those lawyers' bills into a restless mood, Mosscrop returned to his room, and completed the work of dressing. He shaved with exceptional care, and bestowed thought upon the selection of a neck-tie. It occurred to him that he had some better clothes than those he had worn yesterday, and, though he begrudged the time, the temptation

to make the change was irresistible. He did not regret yielding, when he surveyed his full-length image in the mirror on his wardrobe door. He seemed to himself to look years younger than he had done before that momentous birthday. He smiled and nodded knowingly at the happy and confident face in the glass.

Under the circumstances, he should need help with the breakfast. The midnight notion of getting everything ready before he called his guest, submitted to abandonment without a murmur. He reverted joyfully to the original idea of letting her share all the delightful fun of preparing the meal. His fancy played with sportive tenderness about the picture of her, here in his tiny scullery which served as a kitchen, her sleeves rolled up, a towel pinned round her waist for an apron, actually cooking things for them both to eat. Very likely he knew more about that sort of thing than she did; he beheld himself giving her instructions, as they bent together over the big gas cooking-stove. Could anything be more deliciously homelike than that?

That contrary, cross-grained Drumpipes had predicted that the whole thing would seem ridiculous to him in the morning. He affirmed to himself with fervour that it seemed more charming than ever as he went out into the passage, and knocked on the opposite door.

There seemed to be no answering sound, and he struck the panel more sharply, with his ear lowered to the keyhole. Still no response came.

"I am going to Covent Garden for a few minutes," he called through the keyhole; "shall I find you ready to help me when I get back?"

Since this, too, brought no reply, he took out his duplicate key and cautiously opened the door. The question, repeated in a much louder tone, died away in profound silence. The glass eyes of a moose on the wall opposite stared at him with an uncomfortable fixity.

The bedroom door was ajar, and David was emboldened to stride forward and beat smartly on it with his fist. Again he did this, and

then, while a strange excitement welled upward within him—or was it a sinking movement instead?—flung the door open and looked in.

There was no Vestalia here at all!

The details that the bed was neatly made up, that the room showed no trace of recent occupancy, and that the dressing-bag was gone, soaked themselves vaguely through his mind. He looked about, both in this and the outer apartment, for a message of some kind, quite in vain.

His pained attention wandered again in haphazard fashion to the head of the moose, fastened between two windows. The fatuous emptiness of its point-blank gaze suddenly infuriated him, and he dealt its foolishly elongated snout a resounding whack with his open hand. The huge trophy toppled under the blow, swung half-loose on its fastening, then pitched with a crash to the floor.

Mosscrop kicked it violently again and again where it lay.

CHAPTER VII.

Mosscrop had not the heart to breakfast alone in his deserted lodgings.

The impulse to get away mastered him on the instant of its appearance. He strode forth as if delay were fraught with sore perils. At a shabby luncheon-bar in the Strand below he consumed a cup of abominable coffee and a dry sausage-roll in the same nervous haste. The barmaid in attendance was known to him. She annoyed him now by displaying in her manner the assumption that he wished to laugh and joke with her as usual. He glowered at her instead, and met her advances to conversation with a curt nod.

"You must have got out of the wrong side of the bed this morning," she commented loftily.

"Very likely," he answered with cold brevity, counting out the necessary coppers and turning on his heel.

Outside he seemed to himself to choose the direction of his steps quite at random. He walked slowly, trying to fasten his brain down to the task of conjecturing what on earth it all meant. Alas, his mind was as empty as those desolate rooms up at the top of Dunstan's Inn. The power of coherent speculation had left him. It was hardly possible even to arrange in decent sequence the details of what had happened. An indefinitely sweeping rage at destiny in general oppressed all his faculties. He muttered meaningless oaths under his breath as he went along, directed at an intangible "it" which was equally without form and personality, a mere abstract symbol of the universal beastliness of things.

The notion of cursing Vestalia did not suggest itself. So far as he had any intelligible thoughts about her, they were instinctively exculpatory. She seemed indeed to have behaved stupidly, but it must have been under a mis-

apprehension of some sort. Something perverse had happened to lead her off into a foolish course of action. He resolutely declined to open his mind to any other view of her. She must have quitted the Inn for some reason which wholly satisfied her sense of honourable conduct. What was this reason? Had she conjured it up out of her own meditations, or had it been furnished to her from an external source?

All at once he stopped short, mental and bodily progress alike arrested by a striking thought. "Damn *him!*" he murmured to himself, as he turned this new idea over. Now that it had come to him, he fairly marvelled at the dulness which had failed to discover it at the beginning. It was as plain as the nose on one's face—the Earl had bidden Vestalia to begone. "Ah, that miserly, meddling fool of a Drumpipes!" he groaned, between clenched teeth.

This laying bare of the mystery brought no consolation. The day was as irretrievably ruined, the tender little romance as ruthlessly

crushed, as ever. A certain doubtful solace seemed to offer itself in the shape of a quarrel with Drumpipes, but Mosscrop shook his head despondently at it. What good would that do? And for that matter, how should one go to work to quarrel with that tough-hided, fatuous, conceited, dense-witted, imperturbable, and impenetrable idiot? He would never even perceive that the attempt was being made. David piled up in reverie the loathly epithets upon the over-large bald head of his friend with a savage satisfaction. "You preposterous clown!" he snarled at the burly blond image of the absent nobleman in his mind's eye. "You gratuitous and wanton ass! Oh, you unthinkable duffer!"

And somehow there was after all a kind of relief in these comminatory exercises. The dim light of a possible diversion began to filter through the storm-cloud of Mosscrop's wrath. He was still bitterly depressed, and furious as well, of course, but self-possession was returning to him, and with it the capacity for planning and ordering his movements. It occurred to him

that he ought to do something to turn his thoughts temporarily at least from this world-weary sadness.

Up on the opposite corner his eye caught the legend "Savoy Street." He stared at the small sign, perched above the dingy brick cornice of the first-floor, for a moment with an unreflecting gaze. Then he turned and walked briskly down the steep hillside thoroughfare, and into the courtyard of the great hotel which, like the street and the quarter, commemorates in its name the first of a long and steadfast line of needy Continental princes whose maintenance the British tax-payer has found himself fated to provide.

At the desk, he wrote out a card and sent it up as an accompaniment to the inquiry whether Mr. Laban Skinner was in or not.

No, it was reported presently; Mr. Skinner had gone out—but the young lady was in.

David pondered this unexpected intelligence. "Did she tell you that she was in?" he asked the boy, suspiciously.

Yes; she had done so.

Mosscrop discovered that he had been quite unprepared for this. He knit his brows and ruminated upon it. His impression had been at the time that the girl disliked him, or at least disliked the proposition which her absurd father had made. It seemed to him, moreover, that he disliked her in turn. She had stared rudely at poor Vestalia—but then it should be remembered in fairness that all women did that to one another. Her attitude towards him had been ostentatiously apathetic, almost to the point of insolence; and yet he recalled that in that moment when he had caught her unawares, she had been displaying a notable interest in what was going on. The notion that there had been a sort of challenge underlying the mask of studied indifference she had presented to him returned to his mind. And he still needed diversion, too, as much as ever.

"If you will show the way," he said to the boy at this juncture.

The lift bore them a long distance upward,

quite to the roof it seemed. David formed the impression that rents must be cheap at that altitude; but when he took the first glance round the sitting-room into which he found himself presently ushered, the idea vanished.

It was a large and imposingly-appointed room, exhaling, as it were, an effect of high-priced luxury. The broad windows at the front came down to the floor, and opened upon a balcony. There were awnings hung outside to ward off the sunshine, and this threw the whole apartment into a mellow twilight, contrasting sharply with the brightness of the corridor Mosscrop had just quitted.

He looked about him, hesitatingly, to make sure that there really was no one in the room. The glimpse of some white drapery fluttering against the edge of a chair out on the balcony caught his eye, and he moved across to the nearest open window. The noble prospect of the Thames viewed from this height impressed itself with great vividness upon his mind, even in advance of his perception that he had in-

deed found Miss Skinner. He looked downward with a gaze which embraced both the girl and the river, and for a moment they preserved an equally unconscious aspect.

The young lady then lifted her head, sidewise, and acknowledged Mosscrop's presence by a slow drooping movement of her black lashes. "How do you do?" she remarked, placidly. "Bring out a chair for yourself."

He did as he was told, and seated himself near the balustrade, so that he partially faced her; but he looked again at the wonderful picture below, to collect his thoughts.

"I had no idea it was so magnificent up here," he said at last.

"Indeed," commented his companion. It was impossible to say whether the remark was in the nature of an exclamation or an inquiry Mosscrop found himself compelled to glance up, if only to determine this open question.

The realisation that she was extremely well worth looking at swept over him like a flood,

at the instant of his lifting his eyes. It suited her to be bare-headed, and to wear just the creamy white cashmere house-gown that he beheld her in. The glossy plaits and masses of her hair were wonderful. In the softened, tinted half-shadow of the awning her dark skin glowed with a dusky radiance which fascinated him. Her mien was as imperious as ever, but it suggested now an empress disposed to play, a sultana whose inclination was for amusement.

"Did you come up to see the view? I daresay it is even better from the leads. You call them leads here, don't you? Your novels always do, I know."

This speech of hers, languidly delivered, had its impertinent side, without doubt, but Mosscrop caught in its tone a not unamiable intention. She did not smile in response to the puzzled questioning of his swift glance, but he convinced himself none the less that it was a pleasantry. He noted in this instant of confused speculation that she had a book in her lap—a large, red-covered volume with

much gilt on the binding—and that she kept a finger in it to mark some particular place.

"Your father was good enough to ask me to call," he reminded her, with gentleness. "I asked for him, and I——"

"You are disappointed to find him out?"

Yes; there could be no doubt she was amusing herself. "Oh, that depends," ventured David, with temerity.

The girl surveyed him at her leisure. "If I remember aright," she said, "you were invited conditionally. You were to come, or rather to communicate with us, if you decided to close with my father's offer. So I suppose you've made up your mind to accept."

"Well, I should like to talk more about it; get a clearer idea of what was proposed."

"My father takes great pains in expressing himself. I should have said his explanation was as full as anything could well be on this earth."

"To speak frankly," replied David, "I got the idea that you didn't care much about your

father's scheme—in fact, that you disliked it. That's what I wanted to be clear about. It would be ridiculous for me to be going round, delivering instructive lectures to you on antiquities and ruins and so forth, and you hating me all the while for a bore and a nuisance. It would place us both in a false position."

"And you can't stand false positions, eh?"

Mosscrop rose. "I'm afraid I can't stand this one, at all events," he answered, with dignified brevity.

"Oh, you mustn't think of going!" his hostess protested, with a momentary ring of animation in her voice. "My father's liable to return any minute, and he'd be greatly put out to find he'd missed you."

"I could wait for him in the reception room downstairs," he suggested, moodily—"or, for that matter, I don't know that it's very important that we should meet at all."

"I don't call that a bit polite," she commented.

"I'm afraid your standards of politeness are beyond me," he began, formally. Then the absurdity of the thing struck him, and he grinned in a reluctant fashion. "Do you really want me to stay?" he asked, with the spirit of banter in his tone.

"Oh that depends," she mocked back at him. "If you can be amusing, yes."

"Just how amusing must I be?" He dropped into his chair again, and this time laid his hat aside.

"Oh, say as much so as you were yesterday with the young lady of the butter-coloured hair. I think that would about fill the bill."

Mosscrop ground his teeth with swift annoyance. Then he chuckled in a mood of saturnine mirth. Finally he sighed, and dolefully shook his head.

"Ah, yesterday!" he mourned, drawing a still deeper breath.

"You were extremely entertaining, then," pursued the other, ignoring his emotions. "Do you find yourself—as a usual thing, I

mean—varying a good deal from day to day? I ask entirely from curiosity. I've never met anyone before in precisely your position."

"No, I should think not!" he assented, with gloomy emphasis. "I can well believe that my position is unique in the history of mankind. Such grotesque luck could scarcely repeat itself. But I beg your pardon—it isn't a thing that would interest you; I had no business to mention it at all."

"It was I who mentioned it, I believe," she corrected him calmly.

There was obvious meaning in her insistence. He looked up at her in vague surprise, the while he mentally retraced the steps by which the conversation had reached this point. There was undoubtedly a very knowing expression in her eyes. Clearly she had meant to associate Vestalia with what she described as his position—the position which she deemed so unusual; it was equally plain that she desired him to understand that she did so. It was impossible that she should know anything of what had happened. He searched

his memory, and made sure that no personal hint of any sort had drifted into that rambling discourse of his in the Assyrian corridors, which the Americans had more or less overheard. What then was she talking about?

Ah, what indeed? She lay back in her chair, and met his gaze of bewildered interrogation with a fine show of composure. She looked at him tranquilly through lazy, half-closed eyelids. His suspicions discerned beneath the passive surface of this regard animated under-currents of ironical amusement and triumph. There was nothing overt upon which he could found the challenge to an explanation, but as he continued to scrutinise her, he could fancy that her whole presence radiated the suggestion of repressed glee. Whatever the mystery might be, she was extracting great delight from her possession of a clue to it.

"Yes, it *was* you who mentioned my position," he remarked, groping lamely for some sure footing on which to redress his disadvantage. "I don't know that I quite follow you;

wherein do you find my position, as you term it, so exceptional?"

"You yourself have boasted that it couldn't be matched in all history," she reminded him. Her tone was casual enough, but the sense of sport began to gleam unmistakably in her eyes.

"Now you argue in a circle," he remonstrated, with a shade of professional acerbity in his voice. "Your remark came before mine, and hence cannot possibly have been based upon my subsequent comment. If I may be permitted the observation, they seem to teach logic but indifferently in the United States."

"Oh, that is why we came here," retorted the girl, with ostentatious *naïveté*. The conceit pleased her so much that she bent forward, and assumed the manner of one communicating an important fact. "That is why I had my father make you an offer at once. You know, most professors, and teachers, and so on, are so hard to understand. But the moment I laid eyes on you I said, 'There's a

man that I can see through as if he were plate-glass; I can read him like a book.' And, of course, that must be the most valuable of all qualities in an instructor."

"So I am entirely transparent, am I? I present no secrets to your gaze?" Mosscrop spoke like one in whom pique and a sense of the comical struggled for mastery. "Then I cannot do better than beg you to tell me some things about myself. Why, for example, do I sit here patiently and submit to be laughed at, heckled, satirised, and generally bully-ragged by a young lady, whose title to do these things is not in the least apparent to me?"

"Why, don't you remember? You're waiting for papa."

"And incidentally providing his offspring, in the *interim*, with much harmless and chaste entertainment," put in Mosscrop, drily. "I am charmed to have diverted you so successfully. It occurs to me, since you are so readily amused, that you must have been wofully bored before I made my happy appearance."

"Oh, quite the contrary," exclaimed the

girl, with a sudden stress in her tone, which hinted that this was what she had been waiting for. She opened the volume, as she spoke, at the place marked by her finger. "I was reading in the Peerage, you know. It is a most entrancing book. I am never dull when I am reading about earls and things."

"I have heard that the work enjoys a remarkable popularity in your country," David remarked, sourly.

"There is such romance in it!" she went on, in mock rhapsody; "it makes such appeals to the imagination! It puts you at once in an atmosphere of chivalry, of knightly adventures and exploits, of tournaments and chain-armour, and courts of love——"

"And of divorce, and bankruptcy, too," he interposed. "Don't forget those."

The girl looked grave for a moment, and nodded her head as if in relenting apology. Then she recovered her high spirits by as swift a transition.

"And such splendid old names as you get, too!" she continued, with her eyes on the

open page. "Listen to this, for example. Could anything be finer?"

> DRUMPIPES, Earl of. (Sir Archibald-Coronach-Dugal-Strathspey-Malcolm-Linkhaw) Viscount Dunfugle of Inverdummie, and Baron Pilliewillie of Slug-Angus, Morayshire, all in the peerage of Scotland, and a Baronet of Nova Scotia. Born August 24th, 1866. Succeeded his grandfather as 19th Earl January 10th, 1888. Married May 2nd, 1890, Janet-Eustasia-Marjory, 3rd daughter of the Master of Craigiewhaup by his wife, the Hon. Tryphena Pincock (who deceased March 6th, 1879), elder daughter of the 4th Baron Dubb of Kilwhissel. *Seat*, Skirl Castle, near Lossiewink, Elgin. *Club*, Wanderers.

She read it all with marked deliberation and distinctness of utterance. When she finished, silence reigned for some time on the balcony.

"Well, am I not right?" she asked at last, lifting her head, and flashing the full richness of her black eyes into Mosscrop's face. "Don't you admit the inspiration of such names?"

David answered in a hesitating, dubious manner. "I am more curious about the source —and scope—of *your* inspiration," he said.

"Unhappily, it cannot be pretended that *you* are transparent. You confront me with an opacity against which my feeble wits beat in vain. I can see that it is known to you that I know Drumpipes. But why this fact should assume in your mind such portentous and mysterious dimensions, and why you should treat it with the air of one who has unearthed a great conspiracy, a terrible secret, I can't for the life of me comprehend."

"Ah, you are more complicated than I had thought," she replied. "I did not imagine you would keep up the defence so long."

"Me?—a defence? never," cried David, incited in some vague way by this remark to an accession of assurance. "I defend nothing. I surrender with eagerness. I roll myself at your feet, Miss Skinner. All I crave in return is that you will put a label on my submission. It may be weak, but I should dearly like to know what it is that I am abandoning."

"What I should suggest that you give up is your attempt to deceive me—us—as to your identity."

"Ah! am I indeed someone else, then? Upon my word, I can't congratulate the other fellow."

"You wrote your name down for my father yesterday, and again on this card here this morning, as Mosscrop—David Mosscrop."

He assented by a nod, and allowed the beginnings of an abashed and contrite look to gather upon his face.

"Well, it just happened that, the moment I first laid eyes on you, I knew who you really were. By the merest accident, your picture had been shown to me—by a gentleman who knows you intimately, and is indeed distantly related to you—on shipboard coming over. I recognised you instantly, there in the Museum, and I made papa speak to you. I was curious to see what you would say and do."

"I'm afraid you were disappointed. Did you think I would shout and dance, or what?" He struggled with some degree of success to speak impassively.

"I had never met any one before in your position in life, and I had the whim to experi-

ment on my own account." She said this as if defending her action to herself more than to her auditor.

"And may I have my little whim gratified too?" he asked. "I am extremely curious to know how you like your experiment as far as you have got with it."

She did not answer immediately, and he occupied the interval by an earnest mental scuffle after some clue to what she was driving at. He knew of no man who possessed his portrait—at least among those who went down to the sea in ships. He had had no photograph taken for years, to begin with. A distant relation of his, she had said, and on a very recent voyage from America. Who the deuce could it be? What acquaintance of his had been of late in America? All at once the answer leaped upward in his mind. He laughed aloud, with an abruptness which took him not less than his companion by surprise. But then a puzzled scowl overshadowed the grin on his countenance. He saw a little way farther into the millstone, but that was all.

"I hope you don't regret your experiment," he repeated. "It would have been simpler, perhaps, if your father had mentioned that you were friends of Mr. Linkhaw's. That in itself would have been an ample introduction."

"Perhaps we should have done so, had you been alone." Her tone was cool to the verge of haughtiness.

He rapidly considered what this might mean. Her remark clearly indicated that Vestalia's presence had seemed to her reprehensible. Why? There was some intricacy here which he could not fathom. That confounded Drumpipes had told her—what? Eureka! He had it! The picture that she had seen was a little cheap ambrotype of Drumpipes and himself, standing together, which had been made by a poor devil of a wayside photographer, two Derby days before. Undoubtedly that was what the Earl had shown her—the only one he could have shown her. And—why of course—Drumpipes had pointed him, David, out as the Earl. What his motive could have

been, heaven only knew, but this was palpably the key to the riddle.

He grasped this key with decision, on the instant. He straightened himself, frowned a little, and laboriously stiffened the tell-tale muscles about his mouth.

"I don't think I quite like this notion of Linkhaw's babbling about me and my affairs," he said, with austerity.

"Oh, I assure you," she protested, anxiously, "he was very cautious. He only gave the most sparing answers to my questions. I had to literally drag things from him."

"But what business had he showing my picture about to begin with? He shall hear what I think of it! Men's allowances have been stopped for less than that."

"It will be very unjust indeed if you visit it upon him," the girl urged, almost tremulously; "it was all my fault. I asked him one day if he had ever met a nobleman, and he, quite as a matter of course, mentioned that one of his own relatives was an Earl. One day, later, he was showing me a little tin-type

of himself, and he merely said that you were the other person in the picture, that was all."

"And then you proceeded to drag things from him. I believe that was your phrase," remarked David, in a severe tone. The sensation of having this proud and insolent beauty in a tremor of entreaty before him was very delightful.

"Naturally, I asked him questions," she replied, with a little more spirit. "Earls don't grow on every bush with us. And for that matter, why, goodness me! he did nothing but praise you from morning till night. By his account, one would think butter wouldn't melt in your mouth. He made you out a regular saint. I was quite prepared to see you with a halo round your head—and instead, I——"

She stopped short, with a confused and deprecatory smile. David, noting it, rejoiced that he had taken a peremptory tone about the garrulous Linkhaw.

"Instead, you discovered that I was a mere flesh and blood mortal like the rest." He per-

mitted himself to unbend, and even to smile a little, as he furnished this conclusion to her sentence. "Was it a very painful disillusionment?"

"Oh, I've read and heard enough about the lives that your class lead here in Europe," she replied, with a marked reversion toward her former manner. "I don't pretend that I was really surprised."

David assumed a judicial expression. "Considering the way we are brought up, and the temptations that are thrust upon us," he said, impartially, "I would not say that we are so much worse than other men."

"But you are pretty bad—that you must admit."

Before David had satisfactorily framed the admission expected of him, the sound of an opening door and of footsteps came from within.

"It is papa," whispered the girl, leaning forward in a confidential manner. "I'm going to tell him,"

"I see no valid objection," answered David, with dignity.

CHAPTER VIII.

As the balcony was too small for another chair, and Mr. Skinner did not come to the window, his daughter led her guest into the sitting-room.

"Papa," she said, "you will recall the gentleman whom we met yesterday at the British Museum."

Mr. Skinner lifted to its place the *pince-nez* which depended on a gold thread from the lapel of his carefully-buttoned frock-coat, and scrutinised the person indicated in a painstaking manner.

"Ah, yes, indeed," he said, continuing his gaze, but with no salutation, and no offer of the hand.

"It's so dark in here, I don't believe you do," she remarked, to cover the awkwardness

of the moment. "The sun has gone now, any way," and she moved back and put a hand upon the awning-cord.

"Permit me," said David, hurrying to her side, and pulling at the shade.

"He's out of sorts about something," the girl murmured furtively. "Don't mind it; just leave him to me."

In the brightened light, Mr. Skinner's demeanour seemed no more cordial. He regarded his visitor with a doubtful glance, and gave indications of a sense of embarrassment in his presence. The daughter, however, was in no respect dismayed by her responsibility.

"Papa," she said with brisk decision, "it was all a joke yesterday. Our friend was so amused by your offer yesterday——"

"I beg your pardon, Adele," the father interposed ceremoniously, "but it becomes immediately incumbent upon me to express my dissent. To obviate any possible misconception, it should be explicitly stated that, although it is true that the task of formulating the proposal to which you allude did un-

doubtedly devolve upon me, the proposition itself, both in spirit and suggestion, originated in your own consciousness."

"All right," she hurriedly went on, "have it anyway you like. The point is that this gentleman thought it was funny, and so he capped it with his own little joke by pretending to be some one else. He made up that name he gave you on the spur of the moment, just for sport. He came here this morning, just to explain. He was nervous about the deception, innocent though it was. Papa, let me introduce to you Mr. Linkhaw's relation, of whom he spoke so often, you know—the Earl of Drumpipes."

Mr. Skinner took in this intelligence with respectful deliberation. He bowed meanwhile, and, after a moment's deferential hesitation, shook hands in a formal way with David, and motioned him to a seat.

"Sir," he began, picking his phrases with even greater care, "you will excuse me if I do not address you as 'My Lord,' since it is a form of words which I cannot bring myself to

regard as seemly when employed by one human being toward another; but I gather from my daughter's explanation that your statements yesterday concerning your identity were conceived in a spirit of pleasantry. Under ordinary circumstances, sir, the revelation that an entirely serious and decorous suggestion of mine had been received with hilarity might not convey to my mind an exclusively flattering impression. But I do not, sir, close my eyes to the fact that a wide gulf of usage and custom, and, I might say, of principles, separates a simple Jeffersonian Democrat like myself from the professor of an hereditary European dignity. I am therefore able, sir, to accept, with comparatively few reservations, the explanation which you have tendered to my daughter, and vicariously, as I understand it, to me."

David repressed a groan, and hastily cast about in his mind for a decent pretext for flight. "I assure you that it greatly relieves me to find you so courteously magnanimous," he said. "I merely yielded to the playful im-

pulse of the moment; and as your daughter has so kindly told you, I made haste thereafter to repair my error, when its possible misinterpretation occurred to me." He bowed again, in response to the other's solemn genuflection, and looked toward the door.

"I should be pleased, sir," Mr. Skinner said, "if you would honour us by remaining to luncheon."

"Ah, I should have liked that so much," answered David, with fervour, "but unhappily I have an engagement at Marlborough House. It will be no end of a bore, but it can't be helped. An invitation there, you know, is equivalent to a command. That is one of the drawbacks of a monarchy—but of course every system has its weak points."

"That is a generalisation," returned Mr. Skinner, "to which I am not prepared to give unmeasured adhesion. I will explain to you, sir, briefly, the reasons which dictate my hesitation to entirely——"

"I'm afraid, Mr. Skinner, that I must tear myself away," put in David, anxiously con-

sulting his watch. "The Prince never forgives a fellow being late. He has to live so much on a time-table himself, you know, forever catching trains, and changing his uniforms, and turning up at the exact minute all over the place, laying corner-stones, and opening docks and unveiling statues, and so on, that it makes him intolerant of other people's lapses. And he's got a fearful memory for that sort of thing."

"I assume that you speak of the Heir Apparent," commented the other. "Am I to understand that you live in a state of personal subjection—that a nobleman in your position, for example, contemplates with apprehension the contingency of causing even the most trivial and transitory displeasure to the personage alluded to?"

"Apprehension, my dear sir? Positive horror! Ah, you little know the reality! Thoughtless people see us from the outside, and they lightly imagine that our lives are one ceaseless round of luxurious gaiety and gilded pleasure. They fancy that to have titles, to

bear hereditary distinctions, to fill high places at Court, must be the sum of human happiness. Of course, I suppose we do have a better time than the average, but we pay a price for it. We smile, it is true, but there is always a shudder beneath the smile. A mere breath, a suspicion, the veriest paltry whim of royal disfavour, and we might better never have been born! And so," he finished with an uneasy graciousness, "you will understand my abrupt leavetaking now."

"I promise myself on another occasion, sir," said Mr. Skinner, with more warmth, "the privilege of discussing these topics with you at length. I do not deny that I am myself, to-day, somewhat preoccupied, and lacking in the power of intellectual concentration. Another occasion, I trust, will find me better fitted to bestow upon these subjects the alertness of comprehension and clarity of judgment which their importance demands. At the moment, I confess my mind is burdened with another matter."

"O, papa—you haven't gone and lost your

letter of credit!" The girl intervened with accents of alarm.

The old gentleman shook his head, and smiled in a dubious fashion. "No," he replied, hesitatingly, "it is merely that I—I have been enjoined to secrecy about a very curious and interesting revelation which has been made to me, and concealment is profoundly alièn to my nature. The necessity for maintaining a mysterious reserve weighs upon me, sir, with unaccustomed oppression."

"It is something that you have learned this morning?" demanded the daughter. "I'll make you tell me as soon as we're alone."

"Ah, that cannot be," the father answered. "My faith has been honourably pledged, and must be scrupulously observed."

"But surely it couldn't have been stipulated that *I* was not to know," she urged. "That would be absurd. And besides, who knows of even my existence over here?"

"Incomprehensible as it may appear to your perceptions," responded Mr. Skinner, "it happens that you were particularly alluded to

in the terms of the confidential compact imposed upon me."

"Then you had no business to enter into it at all," she replied, vigorously. "Papa, I am surprised at you!"

There was something in his thoughts which lit the old gentleman's dry countenance with a transient gleam of enjoyment. "I hazard the humble opinion that your surprise will be appreciably augmented when, at the proper time, the truth shall have been revealed to you." He turned, with the flickerings of a whimsical smile in his eye, to their guest. "It is an extraordinary coincidence, sir; but you are also in a manner associated with the occult event to which I may not at present more pointedly refer."

David musingly looked the old gentleman in the eye. "Yes, I know," he answered; "but I agree with you that it should not be divulged to your daughter. As you have said, we men of the world are in duty bound to keep a decent veil drawn over certain phases of life. I am quite with you in that, sir; we

cannot sufficiently respect and guard the sweet-minded innocence of our young ladies."

Mr. Skinner looked hard at the nobleman, and drew up his slender figure. "My memory, sir," he announced stiffly, "fails to recall any observation resembling in the slightest degree, either in form or sentiments, that which you have ascribed to me. Forgive me, sir, if I venture to further remind you that I have no desire to regard myself, or to be regarded, as a man of the world, in the sense in which I understand that term to be used by the aristocratic class in Great Britain."

The young lady seemed to share her father's feelings in the matter. "You must remember, Lord Drumpipes," she put in, coldly, "that our standards in such things are not yours. I daresay it seems natural enough to one in your position, and with your antecedents and associations, that a venerable, white-haired old gentleman should have disgraceful secrets which he ought to conceal from his family; but we take a different view

of the meaning of the word 'gentleman,' and of the obligations which it involves."

"Ah, now I have offended you!" cried David, with a show of remorse. "I assure you that my only thought was to help your good father out of a fix. If I have done wrong, I beg you will put it down to my over-eagerness to be of assistance. And now," he stole a dismayed glance at his watch, "now I really must run. Good-bye! Good-bye, Mr. Skinner. Remember that I count upon that famous discussion with you. And you may rely entirely upon my discretion—in the matter of your secret, you know."

Father and daughter stood for a moment, gazing at the door behind which their noble guest had disappeared. Then the girl turned her eyes with decision upon the author of her being.

"Papa," she said, with calm resolution, "what did he intend to convey by his remarks about this secret of yours?"

"Why, Adele," the other protested, faltering a little under her look, "you yourself re-

pudiated, in the most eloquent and unanswerable words, the bare suggestion that I could possibly be animated by the desire to cloak any unworthy deed or incident from your observation."

"That was for *his* benefit," she replied, tranquilly. "I was determined that he should know what we thought of *his* code of morals. But that does not at all affect the question of what you have been doing. Do I understand that you are going to insist on refusing to tell me where you have been, whom you have seen, what your so-called secret is about?"

"Adele!" he urged, "I really must preserve a reticence as to the essential details of the matter in question—perhaps only for a few days—at least until the obligation of secrecy is removed. You would not have me recreant to my plighted faith, would you?"

"But what business had you going and making her any such promise?"

"Her!" Mr. Skinner said, feebly smiling; "you jest, my dear Adele. How can you conceivably imagine it was a 'her'?"

"I don't imagine; I know," responded the daughter, with a hard, dry smile. "You have been seeing that yellow-haired girl that Lord Drumpipes had with him at the Museum yesterday. The letter which summoned you forth this morning was from her. You made some paltering excuses to me, and went out to meet her—and you won't look me in the eye and deny it."

In truth he did not take up her challenge. He hung his head, looked away, and shuffled with his feet. "All I am at liberty to say," he remarked at last, with visible emotion, "is that my grief at being compelled to rest temporarily under the unwelcome shadow of your suspicion is, to some slight extent, mitigated by the consciousness that when you know all you will do ample justice to the probity of my motives and the honourable character of my actions. I might even go further, and express the conviction that the outcome will be of a nature to afford you unalloyed personal satisfaction."

"That may all be," returned Adele; "but,

in the meantime, you don't go out in London any more by yourself!"

. . . . . .

Mosscrop laughed to himself as he ran down the stairs of the hotel. The spirit of mirth remained with him while he more slowly ascended the flight of steps, and the dingy passage and covered by-way leading up to the Strand. It was the most comical thing he had ever heard of, and he chuckled again and again during the climb. But upon the bustling crowded thoroughfare it somehow ceased to seem so funny, or at least its value as a source of entertainment began to diminish rapidly. He found his mind reverting irresistibly to the disappointment of the early morning. The image of Vestalia rose upon his mental vision, and would not go away. He brooded over it as he walked, and recognised that intervening incidents and personalities had in no sense dimmed his interest in it. He pictured her wonderful hair again, her bright-faced smile, her dear little airs and graces, with a yearning emptiness of heart.

The luncheon obtainable at the Barbary Club was even more unpalatable than usual, which was saying much. The familiar fact that the waiters were Germans struck him afresh, and took on the proportions of an international grievance. There were some fellows upstairs playing at what they supposed was whist. He stood for a while over the shoulders of a couple of the gamesters, and noted, with a cynical eye, the progress of their hot rivalry as to which should contribute the larger incapacity and the finer stupidity to the losing of the rubber. When they asked him if he wanted to cut in, he turned away with a snort of derisive scorn.

Over in the billiard-room there were only the marker and the member who played far worse than anybody else in the club. David sourly consented to occupy himself with this egregious outsider, and was beaten by him. The result was so clearly due to accident that he laid some money on the next game. Again the duffer fluked like mad, and won, and in a third game his luck was of such a glaring

character, that Mosscrop could not refrain from loud comment. This his antagonist resented. They parted with harsh words, and Mosscrop, cursing the hour when it first occurred to him to identify himself with such a squalid pot-house, hastened angrily to shake its dust from his feet.

He made his way, by devious streets whose old book-stalls for once beckoned him in vain, to Bloomsbury and the Museum. A kind of idea had grown up unobtrusively in the background of his thoughts, that possibly he might find Vestalia there. It assumed the definite outlines of an expectation as soon as he entered the building. When he stood in the reading-room itself, and began a systematic scrutiny of its radiating rows of readers, it was with as much confidence as if he had come by appointment. The failure to discover her disturbed and annoyed him. He made a slow tour of the inner circle, then another of the broader outer ring, and suffered no one of the professed students to escape his examining eye.

What a crew they were! He had never realised it before. His hostile inspection laid bare the puerile devices of the young fools who came by concerted arrangement, took down books at random, and, sitting close together, carried on clandestine flirtations under the sightless mask of literature. He glowered with a newly-informed vision at the extraordinary females whom no one had planned to meet—the lone women with eccentric coiffures and startling costumes, who emerge from heaven knows where, and mysteriously gather here in quest of something which it seems incredible that even heaven should be able to define. Observing now the vacuous egotism of their flutterings and posturings in other people's way, the despairing clutch at public attention made by their outlandish vestiture and general get-up, David's thoughts settled grimly upon the fact that there were lands, the seats of ancient civilizations, where superfluous female children were drowned at birth. Here, he reflected, with sullen irony, we teach them to read and write, and build and stock

a vast reading-room for them instead. His mood preferred the Ganges to the Thames.

There was more pathos in the spectacle of another class of habitual attendants—the poor, shabby, hungry serfs of the quotation merchant. Mosscrop knew the genus by sight, and in other times had had amusement from their contemplation. Now a sombre rage possessed him as he beheld them toiling unintelligently, hopelessly, under the lash of starvation. He watched one of the slave-drivers for a while, a short, red man, of swollen spiderish aspect, who moved about keeping these sweated wretches at their toil, now doling out a few pence to one who could remain erect unnourished not a minute longer, and who slunk out forthwith with a wolfish haste, now withering some other with whispered reproaches of threats. Mosscrop longed to go and break this creature's neck, or at the very least to kick him, with loud curses and utmost contumely, from the room.

He went out himself, instead, animated by a freshening spirit of resentment at the futility

of existence. From sheer force of habit, he dawdled in front of shop-windows, turned over books and prints in one after another of his accustomed resorts for second-hand merchandise, and otherwise killed time till the dinner hour. But he did it all without any inner pretence that the process afforded him consolation. Even when he met some fellows from the Temple, in Chancery Lane, and joined them in a series of visits to ancient bars in the vicinity, where they all stood at wearisome length, and argued with intolerable inconsequence about wholly irrevelant matters over their drinks, his thoughts maintained a moody concentration upon the theme of his personal unhappiness. The stray contributions which he offered to the general conversation were all of an acrid, not to say truculent, character. He had a sort of dour satisfaction in the utterance of offensive gibes and bitter jokes. Twice the threat of an altercation arose, in consequence of these ill-natured comments of his, and David sullenly welcomed the imminent quarrel; but the intervention of the others, without any help

from him, cleared the atmosphere again. Even the peacemakers, however, evinced the opinion that he was behaving badly, and nodded cheerful adieus when at last he declared that they were a parcel of uninspired loons, with whom he marvelled to find himself consuming valuable time. They lifted their glasses at him mockingly as he strode away, with the gleam of an unexpressed "good riddance!" in their eyes.

The consciousness that he had made himself disagreeable to these fellows had its uses as a counter-irritant to his inner self-disgust. It rendered solitude at least a trifle more supportable. He bought a novel, and read it beside his plate at Simpson's, where the heavy joints and weighty old ale just fitted his mood. The book was one which the papers were talking of for the moment. David reflected grimly as he skimmed the opening chapters that Vestalia had asked him why he didn't write a Scotch novel. They were all the vogue, she said, and while the fashion lasted, it was nonsense for any Scotchman to pretend that he could not

profitably occupy his leisure time. He had replied, with some flippancy, that his imaginative powers might compass the construction of a tale, but were unequal to the task of inventing also a whole dialect to tell it in. Now, as the whim returned to him, his fancy parodied a title for this unborn work. How would "A Goddess, Some Merely Ordinary Fools and Lord Drumpipes" do?

Ah! that Drumpipes! David paid his bill, lit a cigar, and sallied forth, suddenly informed with the notion of going to the Inn, and having it out with the Earl. He doubled up his fists as he hurried along.

The top floor at Dunstan's was wrapped in darkness. Mosscrop knocked and kicked first at "Mr. Linkhaw's" door to make sure that no one was in, then opened his own, and struck a light. The apartment wore still in his eyes the chill desolation of aspect which he remembered from the morning. There had been a change in the weather, and the suggestion of a fire was in the damp air. He put on his loose jacket and slippers, recalling sadly as he did

so the vision he had beheld only twenty-four hours before, of that pretty little ermined foot-gear on the fender beside his, in front of the glowing grate. He brought out the decanter and a glass, and sighed deeply.

Then all at once he caught sight of something white in the letter box. In the same instant he was tearing open a stamped envelope, addressed in a large, strange hand which yet he knew so well, and excitedly striving to gulp in the meaning of the whole written page before him, without troubling to read the lines in their sequence. Yes, it was from her, and—yes, it contained words of kindness and even of tenderness which shone brilliantly forth here and there from the context. He pulled himself together, and walking over to the light, began resolutely at the beginning.

"Dear Mr. Mosscrop,—I hope you were not *very* much disappointed at finding me gone this morning, or rather, I hope you *were* a little disappointed, but will not be so any

longer when you get this explanation. I don't know either that it can be called an explanation, for it doesn't seem to me that I am at all able to explain even to myself, much less to you.

"The fact is that you were so kind and so sweet to me, that I simply *had* to do what I have done. I saw it all, after we had parted. Under the circumstances, and especially considering the delicate and noble manner in which you had treated me, it was the *only thing* I could do!

"I should have left a message for you in your letter-box, but there was not a scrap of paper, not even a book out of which I could tear a fly-leaf, in Mr. Linkhaw's room, nor writing materials of any sort. I have bought this paper at the stationer's, and am writing this note in an hotel writing-room.

"The dear dressing-bag, and the other beautiful things which I owe to you, I took away with me because it would have broken my heart to leave them, and I felt sure you would be glad to have me take them. Every

time I look at them, and all other times too, I shall think of the best man I ever knew or dreamed of. Something *very important* has occurred, which may turn out to be of the *greatest possible advantage* to me. It is very *uncertain* as yet, and I cannot tell you about it at present, but soon I hope to be able to do so.

"In the meantime, please believe in my undying gratitude. VESTALIA."

David drew a long breath, poured a drink for himself, lit his pipe, and sat down to read the letter all over again. He arrived slowly at the conclusion that he was glad she had written it —but beyond that his sensations remained obstinately undefined. The girl had disappeared behind a thick high wall which his imagination was unequal to the task of surmounting. A few stray facts assumed a certain distinctness in his mind: she had evidently gone off quite of her own accord, and she had appreciated the spirit of his attitude towards her the previous day, and she had encountered on this,

the following day, something or somebody which might bring her good luck. What kind of good luck? he wondered.

There was an implied promise in her words that he should be informed when this mysterious beneficence assumed shape. This had very little comfort in it for him. In fact, he found he rather hated the idea of her enjoying good luck in which he had no share.

Suppose instead that it didn't come off. Would she return to him then, or at least let him know, so that he might hasten forward again as her special providence?

Ah, that is what he had wanted to be—her providence. The notion of doing everything for her, of being the source of all she had, of foreseeing her wants, inventing her pleasures, ministering joyfully to the least of her sweet little caprices—the charm of this *rôle* fascinated him more than ever. He recalled in detail the emotions of delight he had experienced in buying things for her. By some law which he recognised without analysing, the greatest

pleasure had arisen from the purchase of the articles which she needed most. There had been only a moderate and tempered ecstasy in paying for champagne, but oh, the bliss of buying her boots, and those curling-irons, and the comb! He thrilled again with it, in retrospect. What would it have been to see her clad entirely in garments of his providing?

But the cage was empty—the bird had flown. Would she come back again? Was there really the remotest hint of such a possibility in her letter?

No. He read it still again, and shook his head at the fender with a despairing groan. The gloom of his reverie benumbed his senses. He let his pipe go out, and suffered the glass at his elbow to remain untouched, as he sat with his sad thoughts for company, and did not even hear the footsteps which presently ascended the stairs.

A soft little knock at the door startled him from his meditations. He stood up, with his heart fluttering, and lifted his hand

in wonderment to his brow. Had he been asleep and dreaming?

The dainty tapping on the panel renewed itself. David moved as in a trance toward the door.

CHAPTER IX.

Mosscrop turned the spring-lock noiselessly, and drew the door open with caressing gentleness. His eyes had intuitively prepared themselves to discern the slender form of Vestalia in the dim light of the passage. They beheld instead, with bewildered repulsion, a burly masculine bulk. Wandering upward in angry confusion from the level on which they had expected her dear face, they took in the fatuous, moon-like visage of Lord Drumpipes.

"Dear God!" groaned David, in frank abandonment to disgust.

"I came up quietly this time," said the Earl. "You made such a row about my being noisy last night, I thought to myself, 'Now, anything to please Davie! I'll steal up like a mouse in list-slippers.'"

David scowled angry impatience at him. "Who the deuce cares what *you* do?" he demanded, roughly. "You might have marched up with a Salvation Army band, for all it matters to me."

"Ah," said Drumpipes, placidly pushing his way past Mosscrop through the open door. "Well, give me a drink, Davie, man, and then tell me all about it. Where may the lady be at the present moment?"

Mosscrop came in, and produced another glass with a gloomy air. He watched the Earl seat himself in the biggest chair and help himself from the decanter, and light his pipe, all in moody silence. "She's gone away," he said at last, coldly.

"And a good job, too!" remarked the other. "Distrust all yellow-hair, Davie! Have you been in my place and seen what that woman did? There was my Athabaska moose actually torn from the wall, and pulled to bits on the floor! It's a matter of fifty shillings, or even more, Davie. Considering what you'd already spent on her, I call that

heartless behaviour on her part. She must be a bad sort indeed to take all you would give her, and fool you to the top of your bent, and then wantonly destroy property that she knew you'd have to make good, before she took French leave. Ah, women are not given that kind of hair for nothing! You're well out of a thankless mess, Davie."

Mosscrop looked musingly at his friend. He smiled a little to himself, and then sighed as well. A calmer temper returned to him. "I don't take your view of it, Archie," he said, almost gently. "I have been as sad about it as a child who's lost its pet, but I'm less disconsolate than I was. Some compensations occur to me—and besides, I have a letter from her. It came to-night, and from its tone——"

"Burn it, man, burn it!" the other adjured him, with eager fervour. "Drive the whole business from your mind! If you'll give me your solemn word, Davie, not to see her again"—the Earl paused, to invest his further words with a deeper gravity—"if you'll promise faithfully to have no more to do with

her, I'll forgive you the moose. I said fifty shillings, but I doubt your getting a good job much under three pounds. Well, then, if you say the word, I'll pocket that loss. Hang it all, you're my boyhood friend, and I'd go to a considerable length to save you from a dangerous entanglement of this sort. Although it was by no means an ordinary head. Man, I fair loved that moosie!"

Mosscrop's smooth-shaven and somewhat sallow visage had gradually lost its melancholy aspect. A cheerful grin began now to play about the corners of his mouth. "Archie," he said with an affectation of exaggerated seriousness, "a moose more or less is not worth mentioning by comparison with the situation which is about to confront you. I know the particular beast you speak of. It was not up to much. The fur was dropping out in patches on its neck, one of its eyes was loose, and the red paint on the nostrils was oxidized. You would not have got twelve-and-six for it anywhere in the world. But if it had been the choicest trophy that was ever mounted, and

then its value were multiplied a hundred-fold, it would still be a waste of your time to give it a second thought. Graver matters demand your attention, Archie."

The Earl's countenance lengthened, and he set down his glass. He apparently did not trust himself to speak, but stared in alarmed inquiry at his friend.

"As you said a while ago," pursued David, with vexatious deliberation, "we have been pals from boyhood. My father was your grandfather's man of business, and was your factor till his death. You and I played together before we were breeched. We went to school together, and I spent more holidays at Skirl with you than I did at home. So I know the ins and outs of your family and its affairs practically as well as you do. I know your sisters——"

"You don't mean that Ellen has given up her Zenana mission work in Burmah, and returned here to England?" Drumpipes interposed, with a convulsive catch in his breath.

"No; the Lady Ellen, so far as I know, is

still peacefully occupied in harrowing up the domestic life of the Orient in her well-known and most effective manner."

"Well, anything else *must* be a minor evil," said the Earl, with an accent of relief. "Whichever of the rest of them it is, Davie, I tell you at the outset that I wash my hands of the business. My sisters rendered the first twenty-five years of my life a torment upon earth. They bullied me out of all peace in life as a youngster; they made my rotten marriage for me; they took my money and then blackened my character in reward; they——"

"Oh, I know all those gags by heart," interposed Mosscrop. "They're really very decent bodies, those sisters of yours; if they had a fault, it was in believing that they could make a silk purse out of a sow's ear. But it's not about them at all that I was speaking. The point is, Archie, that I have made the acquaintance of Mr. Laban Skinner and his extremely attractive daughter."

The Earl took in this intelligence with ponderous slowness. He sipped at his glass in

silence, and then stared for a little at his friend. "Well, what is there so alarming about that?" he demanded at last, roughening his voice in puzzled annoyance. "They're respectable people, aren't they? And what the deuce are you driving at, anyway?"

"Ah, if you take that tone with me, old man, I pull out of the affair at once."

Drumpipes scowled. "What affair? How do you know there is any affair! And what business have you got being in it, if there is an affair? You're over-officious, my friend. You take too much on yourself."

Mosscrop laughed with tantalising enjoyment in his eyes. "Confess that you think of making a Countess of the lady."

"Well, and what if I do?" the Earl retorted. "Damn it all, man, I haven't to ask your leave, have I? And, come now, I put it to you straight, have you ever seen a finer woman in your life?"

David lifted his brows judicially, and held his head to one side. "Oh, I'm not saying she's amiss—in externals," he admitted.

"Man, she's wonderful! Just wonderful!" cried the other. "Did you mind her walk? It is as if she'd never been outside a palace in her life. And the face, the eyes, the colour, the figure—what Queen in Europe can match them? Man, since I first laid eyes on her, I've not been myself at all. The thought of her bewitches me. I hardly know what I'm doing. I've been to-day to my tailor's, and I gave him orders that fair took his breath away. The most expensive clothes, and even furs, I ordered with as light a heart as if it were a matter of sixpences. The man knows me from childhood, and he gazed at me as if I was clean daft. He was shaking his head to himself when I came away. Oh, I'm quite a different person, I assure you. I literally hurl money about me, nowadays."

"You must indeed be in love," said Mosscrop. "The father—he gives one the notion of a man of wealth."

The Earl's face glistened. "He's in the Standard Oil Company!" he whispered, impressively.

This fact created an atmosphere of dignified solemnity for itself. The two men looked at each other gravely for a while, saying nothing. Then the Earl, with a contemplative air, refilled his glass.

"She is the most beautiful woman I've ever known," he said, earnestly; "and I think she will marry me."

"Physical beauty and Standard Oil do make an alluring combination," remarked David philosophically; "but——"

"Oh, there are no 'buts,'" Drumpipes insisted. "She's as fine in mind and temper as she is in body. I'm very particular about intellect, as you know, and I've studied her closely. She has a very sound brain, Davie—for a woman. But how on earth did you come to stumble upon them?"

Mosscrop did not explain. "The thing that impressed me about her, curiously enough," he said, with tranquil discursiveness, "was her extremely democratic aversion to our ranks and hereditary titles. She and her

father seem to be the most violent anti-aristocrats I ever knew."

"Yes, that *is* a trifle awkward," the Earl admitted. "I don't think it's more than skin-deep with the old man, but Adele—that's her name, as beautiful as herself, isn't it?—she's tremendously in earnest about it. That has rather queered my pitch—I haven't told them, you know, about the title and all that. They know me just as simple Mr. Linkhaw."

"'Simple' is so precisely the word," commented Mosscrop.

"Well, what was I to do?" the other protested in self-defence. "I was travelling under that name in Kentucky—went there to look at a big sale of thoroughbreds, you know—and met the father, and then I met the girl, and they had me to their house in the country—a magnificent place, by George—and she had so much to say against the classes here, and took such a strong position against titles and all that—why, I *would* have been a juggins to tell her at the start; and after, it gradually occurred to me that I wouldn't say

anything at all, but just go on and win her as plain Mr. Linkhaw. Then I could be sure I was being loved for myself alone, couldn't I?"

"Your sentimentality is most touching," said David; "but I fear it will cost you heavily."

"Oh, by the way, yes," remarked Drumpipes, collecting his thoughts; "you said something awhile ago about there being a bother of some sort. What is it?" Then an idea occurred to him, and he lifted his head eagerly. "You haven't gone and blabbed about me, have you—told her who I was, and all that?"

"Quite the contrary," smiled David. "It was she who recognised *me* at once as the Earl of Drumpipes. It seems you showed her my picture on shipboard, and told her who I was, and all about me. Do you recall the incident?"

The Earl nodded, foolishly. "It's my confounded imagination," he groaned. "I'm always making an ass of myself like that. God only knows why I should have gone out of my

way to invent that idiotic rubbish. But you get awfully hard up for conversation on ship-board, you know. And so it all came out, and she's chuckling to think what a clumsy liar and guy I made of myself—and I've gone and ordered all those clothes—and——"

"Be reassured, most noble Thane," cried David, gaily. "There has been no disclosure. Nothing came out. I accepted the situation. I did not for an instant betray you. I said, 'Certainly: I *am* the Earl of Drumpipes,' without so much as the flicker of an eyelid. There's friendship for you, if you like."

"And did she believe—" the Earl began to ask. Then he choked with rising mirth, gasped, rolled about in his chair, and finally burst forth in resounding laughter. "She thinks you—you"—he started out again, and once more went off in loud merriment. "It's the funniest thing I ever heard of," he murmured at last, restoring his composure with difficulty, and grinning at Mosscrop through eyes wet with joyful tears.

"It delights me to see how keenly the

humorous aspect of the matter appeals to you," observed David, "because there is another phase of it which may seem to be deficient in gaiety."

"No; you as the Earl, that's too funny!" persisted Drumpipes, with a fresh outbreak of laughter. But this somehow rang a little false at the finish. A half-doubtful look came into his eyes, and sobered his countenance. "But you'll stand by me in this thing, old man, now that you've begun it, won't you?" he asked, in in an altered tone.

"But I didn't begin it," David pointed out calmly. "You began it yourself, and she took it up of her own accord. I've simply sacrificed myself in your interest. I stood still, and heard my motives aspersed, my character vilified, my objects in life covered with contumely, all on account of your hereditary crimes, and took it all like a lamb. But to assume that I'm going to do this again, or indefinitely, is another matter. I don't mind submitting to a single temporary humiliation for a friend's sake, but to make a profession of

it is too much. If it were even a decent full-blown peerage it might be different, but to be traduced for nothing better than a Scotch title —no, thank you!"

"You're not the friend I took you for," commented the Earl, in depressed tones. "For that matter," he added, defiantly, "we were Pilliewillies in Slug-Angus before the Campbells were ever heard of, or the Gordons had learnt not to eat their cattle raw. And no Linkhaw has ever said to a Mosscrop, 'I see you're in a hole and I'll leave you there.'"

David smiled. "No, you would always give a hand—for a fixed price. Well, Archie, I'm not saying I won't see you through all this, but there must be conditions. And there must be a plan. What on earth do you intend to do?"

"Well, my idea is," the other answered, hesitatingly, "that I should ask her to be my wife while she still supposes I am merely Mr. Linkhaw. She is like all American girls in this, that she believes entirely in love matches.

So if she will marry me as Mr. Linkhaw, it will signify that she loves me. Very well then, that being the case, I can say to her afterward that I ventured upon a trifling deception, solely to have the chance to win the woman I wanted, and to make sure that I was being loved for myself alone. And then, hang it all, I don't believe it lies in any woman's skin to be angry at finding that she's been made a countess unawares. If I said I was an Earl and turned out not to be one, then she'd have a grievance, but it's the other way about."

"Precisely," put in David, "that particular ignominy is reserved for me. But suppose she doesn't accept you."

"That's hardly worth supposing. It's as good as understood between us, I think, that she will accept me."

"But then suppose she jilts you, after you disclose to her that you are not plain Mr. Linkhaw."

"If that's well managed, I'm not afraid of it, either. You see, her father's not an out-and-out American. He was really born in

England, and went out there as a boy. That's a very curious thing, you know. Englishmen who go there, and like the place, get to be more American than the Yankees are themselves. But they don't change their blood, do they? And women are pretty much alike, too, whatever their blood may be. They're all organised to stand a coronet on the corner of their pocket handkerchiefs. No, it'll be all right, if only you stay by me."

"Ah, now we come to realities," said Mosscrop, genially. "It'll be rather an expensive business, Archie. I have very high notions, my friend, as to the scale on which an Earl should comport himself. I could not dream of doing the thing on the thrifty and contracted basis which suits you. The task is a difficult one to me. I shall have to sit and look entirely devoid of mental sensations of any sort for hours at a time. I know nothing of football and cricket, and have not the name of a single jockey on my tongue; this will render conversation an embarrassing matter for me. I shall suffer continually from the

knowledge that I am being regarded as a vicious fool, a rake, a gambler, and libertine of the most heartless description, and this will wear a good deal on my nerves. Compensation of some sort I must have. Now, I entertain the theory that a nobleman should never have any small change about him at all. Tips to waiters I would make a great point of. They should invariably be of gold. To slip a sovereign into a hall-porter's hand is also a valuable action. His subsequent demeanour gives the cue to the attitude of the whole visible world toward you. A four-in-hand to Brighton is good substantial form, too, if enough pains be taken with the outfit. A private hansom in town is, of course, indispensable. I realise, Archie," he concluded apologetically, "that I am not displaying a specially comprehensive grasp of the requirements of rank. I can only think of a few things now, on the spur of the moment; but I will concentrate all my energies on the task once I take it up in earnest. You may trust me to rise to the occasion. I will be a noble-

man that mere baronets will turn round in the street to look after."

Drumpipes exhibited a wan and troubled smile. "You'd have your joke, Davie, out of any man's distress," he said, weakly.

"Joke!" cried Mosscrop. "You make a woful error there, Archie. Never was man more serious."

"But there'd be no opportunity for you to spend money, or display yourself," urged the other. "Not, of course, that I would begrudge a pound or two, more or less, if there were a real need of it. But in this case, the whole point is that you should lie low, and not be seen any more. There is no necessity that she should meet you again. In fact, the more I think of it, the clearer it is that she shouldn't. It might spoil everything, don't you see?"

"Oh no, my lad!" rejoined David, cheerfully. "I'm not of the hermit variety of aristocrat. I'm the kind of Earl who's on the spot, and who lets people know that he is present. I will have rings on my fingers and bells on my toes. I will—why, let me see!"

His face brightened at some wandering thought. "Why, man, I have a birthday in six days' time! That's it, the 24th. I knew there was the difference of a year lacking a week between us. She read it to me this morning out of the peerage—August 24th. Very well, then, I will celebrate the anniversary as it has never been celebrated before. I will provide an entertainment for my immediate friends upon a scale befitting my position and the importance of the event commemorated. What do you think of a special saloon-carriage to Portsmouth, and a dinner on my yacht, eh? One could be hired and manned for the occasion, and a staff of cooks and servants sent down from an hotel here. Or could you get them in Portsmouth? Does anything more appropriate occur to you?"

"Go on with your jest," replied the other, sullenly. "All I can say is, it's in damned bad taste, though. Here I am in this predicament, and you pour vinegar into my wounds instead of oil."

"Standard Oil, I assume that you refer to.

No, you shall have the oil, Archie. You shall be my guest on the occasion, and you shall meet Mr. and Miss Skinner. We four will constitute the party; and I will provide such an engaging spectacle of the nobleman, the bearer of hereditary dignities and titles, seen close at hand among his intimate friends, that the lady will be moved to admiration. She will say, 'Ah, I never guessed before how delightful an Earl could be, how perfect in manners, how admirable in tact, how superb in his capacity as host.' I will reconcile her to the aristocracy *en bloc*."

"Say, you know," interposed Drumpipes, "I'm not sure there isn't something in that."

"Something in it? My dear sir, it's rammed with fructifying probabilities. I give this party, and I do it as an Earl should do things. I exert myself to fascinate this trans-Atlantic twain. I lead their imaginations captive to my hereditary seductiveness. I make them feel that to be the guests of an Earl is more than beauty and fine raiment and Standard Oil. I excite them to a warm

glow of tenderness toward feudalism, a mood that melts at mere thought of the mediæval. At that psychological moment you jump in and intimate that you're something of an Earl yourself—and there you are!"

Drumpipes nodded approving comprehension, while he pondered the project thus outlined. "I'm not sure I don't like the scheme," he repeated. "It's risky, though. She's fearfully keen of scent, that girl is. If you didn't play it for all you were worth, every minute, she'd twig the thing like a shot. You'd leave her with me a good deal, wouldn't you, and devote yourself to the old man? That would be the safest, you know."

"That would hardly do. It wouldn't be in character. When an Earl is giving a party, and there is a beautiful young woman about, he doesn't go and talk with windy old fossils in frock-coats. It would look unnatural. It might as like as not excite suspicion. And now you'd better clear out. I want to go to bed."

The Earl rose, stood irresolute for a mo-

ment, and then put a hand on Mosscrop's shoulder. "Davie," he said gravely, "there's one thing you must remember. You're not a good man to handle money—if I didn't know your forbears, I'd never credit your being a Scot at all—remember, laddie, that those lawyers have run up terrible bills against me, and farm values have all dropped in the most fearful fashion, and I've not kept so tight a hand on the purse-strings of late, myself, as usual, and so do this thing as moderately——"

"Oh, you be damned!" laughed Mosscrop, and pushed him from the room.

When he was alone, the notion of going to bed seemed to have lost its urgency. He lighted his pipe, and sat down to read Vestalia's letter once again.

CHAPTER X.

At breakfast, three mornings later, Mr. Laban Skinner and his daughter dallied over their plates, and sent the waiter out again with some asperity when he, taking it for granted they must have finished the meal, came in to clear the table.

Each had been reading a letter, from the early morning mail.

"It is an invitation from the Earl of Drumpipes," remarked the father, regarding his daughter over his *pince-nez*, "expressing, in what I am constrained to describe as somewhat abrupt and common-place terms, his desire that we should consider ourselves as his guests during the entire day upon the approaching 24th instant, the occasion being the anniversary of his birth." He handed over

the note for her inspection as he spoke. "The impression which his phraseology produces upon me," he added, "is that of one performing a perfunctory act of courtesy to foreigners of his acquaintance, to whom he extends the ceremonial proffer of a hospitality which he assumes will be declined."

"Oh, not at all, papa," commented Adele, briefly glancing at the note. "All noblemen write in that formal way. It is a part of their bringing-up. No; he wants us to come, right enough. I have a letter here from Mr. Linkhaw, explaining the thing. Of course it was a suggestion of his."

"I venture the hope," said Mr. Skinner, "that he improves the opportunity to also explain the otherwise unintelligible fact that during an entire week we have had neither ocular evidence nor any other tangible manifestation of his presence upon this side of the Atlantic. I do not hesitate to avow my surprise at what, after his manifold and, I might say, even importunate professions of eagerness to place his services at our disposal in London,

I find myself unable to refrain from regarding as his indifference to our—our being here."

"No," said Adele, confidently, "it's all right. He was kept longer in Scotland than he expected—very urgent family business of some sort—and only arrived in London a couple of days ago, and has been up to his eyes in work since he came. Besides," she continued with a little smile, "he is very frank; he says he has no clothes fit to go about in London with, but his tailor is working at some new ones for him day and night, and they are promised for the 23d, so that at the birthday party next day——"

"I am far from presuming, Adele," interrupted the father, gravely, "to ascribe to you a deficiency or obtuseness of perception where considerations of delicacy are involved; but I think I am warranted in pointing out that at home, at least in the social environment to which you have been from your infancy accustomed, a young gentleman would intuitively eschew a subject of this nature in his correspondence with a young lady."

"Oh, they're different here," explained the daughter, with nonchalance. "They talk quite openly over here of lots of things which we never dream of mentioning. You remember that lady in front of us at the theatre last night—when the men in their dress suits came over to talk with her between the acts—how she told them right out, that although it was so hot she had to fan herself all the while, still her legs felt quite shivery. Now, a speech like that would stand Louisville on its head, let alone Paris, Kentucky, but here it passes without the slightest notice. It's the custom of the country. I rather like it myself."

Mr. Skinner sighed, and pecked timorously at his egg with a spoon. "I am not wanting, I trust, in tolerance for the natural divergences of habit and manner which distinguish the widely-separated branches of the Anglo-Saxon race, or in a desire to accommodate myself to their peculiarities when I confront them in the course of foreign travel; but I with difficulty bring myself to contemplate with satisfaction the method of partaking of a soft-boiled egg

which obtains favour in these islands. To my mind, the negation of the principle of a centre of gravity involved in the construction of this egg cup, combined with the objectionably inadequate dimensions of the spoon——"

"Dig it out on to your plate, then; the waiter won't come in again till I ring," suggested the daughter.

"I prefer the alternative of abstention," he answered. "The spectacle of stains upon the cloth or upon the plate would be equally suggestive to the servant's scrutiny."

He rose as he spoke. Adele, gathering up the letters, did likewise, and rang the bell.

Mr. Skinner, having glanced out at the river panorama from the balcony window for a little, and then looked over the market columns of a newspaper, turned again to his daughter.

"I gather that we are to accept the invitation of the Earl of Drumpipes," he remarked, tentatively.

Adele nodded. "Why, of course," she said; "that's to be the formal beginning of

everything. It is intended to make our position here perfectly regular. Lord Drumpipes is the head of Mr. Linkhaw's family. It is entirely becoming that he should take the initiative in recognising us."

"Ah yes, in recognising us," he repeated. "I suppose, Adele, it would be futile for me to recur to the question whether you have sufficiently weighed the opposing considerations with regard to Mr. Linkhaw, and the——"

"Mercy, yes!" interposed Adele, with promptitude. "Don't let's have that all over again. I've quite settled everything in my own mind."

"Since I was afforded the opportunity of personally observing and conversing with the Earl of Drumpipes," pursued the father, "and of thus forming authoritative conclusions as to the British nobility in general, I have devoted much thought to the subject. While I do not suggest that my well-known views upon the aristocratic institution, as a whole, have undergone any perceptible transformation, I do not

shrink from the admission that the thought of being connected by marriage with the bearer of an hereditary title no longer presents itself to me in such repulsive colours as was formerly the case. If, therefore, with your undoubted advantages, it should occur to you to entertain the idea of a possible alliance with the nobility, I would not have you feel that my convictions formed a necessarily insuperable barrier to——"

"No, no!" the daughter broke in, with a laugh. "I'll promise to disregard your convictions as much as you like. But now I want you to go out, and kill time by yourself somewhere till luncheon. I want to be left alone. There *is* some place where elderly American gentlemen can go, isn't there, without getting into mischief? Oh yes, you must go, and not just downstairs to hang about the hotel entrance, but straight away somewhere. Why? My dear papa, I have my secrets as well as you."

"But that secret of mine," he protested feebly, "I assure you, Adele, that it is really

nothing at all. That is, it does involve matters both interesting and important; but the fact that I am precluded from mentioning them is in the nature of a pure accident, and wholly without significance."

"Good-bye till luncheon time," answered Adele, with affable firmness. "And mind you quit the premises."

Mr. Skinner found his hat, smiled dubiously at his daughter, and without further parley took himself off.

Adele, left alone, looked at the watch in her girdle, and compared its record with that of the ornate clock on the mantel. She took up the paper and ran an aimless eye over one page after another. Then she walked about with a restless movement, pausing from time to time to bend a frowning yet indifferent inspection upon the scene spread out beyond the balcony.

At last there came a tap on the door, and at sound of this, even as she called out a clear, commanding "Come!" she withdrew all signs of perturbation, or of emotion of

any sort, from her beautiful dark countenance.

It was Vestalia who entered the room—Vestalia, clad in daintily unpretentious and becoming garments, neatly gloved, and with much radiant self-possession upon her pretty face. She paused upon the threshold, nodded rather than bowed to her hostess, and let a little smile sparkle in her eyes and play about her rosebud of a mouth.

"Your father does not succeed very well in keeping his secrets, I observe," she remarked, pleasantly, by way of an overture to conversation.

"Won't you please to be seated," said Adele, with exaggerated calmness. She herself took a chair, and slowly surveyed her visitor as she went on: "My father has no secrets from me. He tries to have—once in a blue moon—but it doesn't come off. I may tell you frankly, however, that he has in this case told me nothing. I found your address, and other information, in looking through his pockets. I am under no obligation to tell you

this: I simply feel like it, that's all. I hate dissimulation."

"And I suppose you have your things made up without pockets," suggested Vestalia, amiably.

Adele put some added resolution into her glance. "I wrote asking you to call," she said coldly, "because it became a nuisance not to know what you were up to."

"Ah," replied Vestalia, "it looks as if your father must have destroyed some of our correspondence. How thoughtless of him!"

Miss Skinner paused, and knitted her queenly brows a trifle. She did not seem to be getting on. "I have no wish to waste time in trying to be funny," she avowed, after some hesitation. "Now that you are here, have you any objection to telling me why you swore my father to keep a secret from me?"

"Oh, just a whim of mine, nothing more," Vestalia assured her, lightly. "I frequently have notions like that, that I can't in the least account for."

"No, you had a reason," insisted the other,

with gravity. "And you must tell me what it was. I have been frank with you."

"And I will not be behind you in candour," said Vestalia, as if won by an appeal to her better self. "It was because you looked at me in the Museum as if you thought my hair was dyed."

"Well, so it is, isn't it?" demanded Adele, bluntly.

"Upon my honour, no!" the other replied. "And now you look at me as if you thought that that wasn't much to swear by. It's possible that you do not realise it, but your eyes leave something to be desired in the matter of politeness."

"I'm afraid that's true," Adele assented. "I have an effect of looking very hard at things, simply because I'm near-sighted. I ought to wear glasses, but they do not suit me."

"Yes," said Vestalia, with a meditative look, "it would be a pity for you to put them on. They *would* detract from your face. It is very beautiful as it is—for a dark style."

"Sometimes I feel that I am almost tired of being dark," confessed Adele. "Your hair is the most wonderful thing I ever saw. I could see that your gentleman-friend at the Museum admired it immensely."

"Oh yes, he said so repeatedly," Vestalia replied, with a demure display of pleasure at the recollection.

Again there was a little pause. Then Miss Skinner essayed another opening. "Your name—Peaussier—would indicate French extraction," she remarked. "And French people are so very dark, as a rule, aren't they? My mother was a Creole—from Louisiana, you know—and I suppose that accounts for my colour."

"Well, my mother was Scotch," explained Vestalia, "and they are sandy."

"The Scotch gentleman that you were with at the Museum—he was decidedly a dark man," suggested Adele, with a casual manner.

"Now that I think of it, so he was," said Vestalia.

The measured and ceremonious ticking of the expensive clock on the mantel had the silence to itself for a space, while the two ladies looked at each other.

"So you won't tell me anything?" Miss Skinner exclaimed at last.

"The trouble is, don't you see, that I am quite in the dark as to what you want to know. If you will tell me just what was in your father's pockets, I can judge then what gaps exist in your information."

Adele laughed aloud. "I believe you are really a tip-top good fellow, in spite of everything," she declared. "Do tell me what it is you are doing! I assure you you're utterly wrong in thinking that I am a person to guard against, to keep secrets from. Come, don't you see how much I really like you? And you won't trust me! I suppose it is the blonde temperament, suspicious and unresponsive and calculating. Or no, I don't mean that, you know I don't, but you might repose more confidence in me, when I have told you everything."

"Everything?" murmured Vestalia, sweetly.

"About papa's pockets, you know."

"Ah, yes."

"It was all your fault," urged Adele. "It was you who drove me to it. And if you don't tell now, goodness only knows what crimes I may not be driven to commit, in addition."

"Let me hasten to avert this woful catastrophe," cried Vestalia. "The matter is simplicity itself. I am by profession, trade, whatever you call it, a tracer of pedigrees, genealogies. I served my apprenticeship under an American lady, who worked entirely for American customers. She is dead now, and the business is broken up, and I have been idle for a long time. When I saw your father and heard his name, a thought occurred to me. I know a good deal about the Skinners in England."

"Papa was born in England himself, you know," interposed Adele, with rising interest.

"Yes, I know," Vestalia went on. "As I said, I have exceptional sources of information

about the family, and it occurred to me that very likely he would be glad to have the records searched, and a full pedigree drawn up. I wrote to him, accordingly—he had mentioned this hotel—and I came and saw him downstairs in the reception-room, and he seemed delighted with the idea, and gave me a commission at once. What was more important still, he was kind enough to pay me something in advance. It came just at the moment to—to supply a very urgent want, too, I can tell you."

"Ah, poor girl!" said Adele, tenderly. "But why on earth were you afraid that *I* should know? I don't believe your story about the hair, you know."

"Really it *was* that," protested Vestalia. "I could see that you didn't like me. I *was* afraid of you—that is, of your prejudicing your father against me. And if you only knew how desperately I was in need of the job! Don't you remember, you did look very sharply at me."

"If I did, it was because I was surprised to —to—see who you were with."

"How do you mean?" queried Vestalia, puzzled. "We were both entire strangers to you, surely."

"No. I recognised the gentleman from a picture I had seen of him. I had a kind of idea that he was not precisely a nice gentleman for you to be with."

"Then you had a preposterous and wickedly mistaken kind of idea," said Vestalia, with decision. "There isn't a truer or nobler-spirited gentleman on this earth than he is. I have reason to know what I say. If anybody has told you otherwise, you have been lied to, that's all."

"Dear, dear, how much you are in earnest," cried Adele. "You must be *my* friend, and defend me behind my back like that, too. If he liked your hair immensely, why, so do I."

"Don't let us joke about him," put in Vestalia, with seriousness. "I feel very keenly about my obligation to him. He saved my life—and—and I'd rather talk about something else. We were speaking of the Skinners—and their pedigree."

Adele assented, with an inclination of the head, to the diversion, though her eyes retained their gleam of surprised curiosity. "Yes, the Skinners," she said, vaguely.

"I can trace them up to Sir Theobald Skinner, Knight, who obtained a grant of the Abbey lands of Coggesthorpe, Suffolk, in 1541—who in turn was the grandfather of Walter Skinner, who married Elizabeth, daughter and co-heir of John Banstock, Esquire, of Meechy, Norfolk, and became first Lord Gunser."

Adele pricked up her ears. "What is that? Are we related to the nobility? Oh, that is what papa meant by something interesting and important! Who would have supposed he could be so sly? Oh, sure enough, that would account for——" She broke off short, and smiled, first knowingly to herself, then with frank cordiality to Vestalia. "Oh, go on," she urged. "Tell me about our lords."

Vestalia shook her head. "We—that is, you have no lords nowadays," she admitted, ruefully. "The Gunser peerage became extinct in the male line nearly two hundred years

ago. The collateral branches of the family sank to be yeomen on the soil their ancestors had owned—some of them became even peasants, agricultural labourers. There are no prosperous or polite Skinners nowadays—except *your* immediate branch."

"And even I haven't got polite eyes," laughed Adele. "Yes, I remember papa telling how poor his people were. He hardly knew the taste of meat, he said, till he went to America as a boy. And so you have traced all his relations out. Are there any cousins or near connections living now, do you know? He had a brother older than himself, Abram was his name, I fancy, and he enlisted in the army and went to the dogs, I think. At least, father never heard of him afterward."

"He is dead," Vestalia re-assured her. "He did go to the dogs, as you say. He had some sons, but they are dead too."

"And so there were actually Skinners in the peerage!" mused Adele, aloud. The thought seemed to excite her. She rose and

looked at herself in the mirror, over Vestalia's head. The latter stood up as well.

"Oh, must you be going?" said Adele. "There was so much I wanted to say to you. We must meet soon again. I am going to insist upon that. You see, I know absolutely no one over here of my own sex, except you. It will be different in a few days, now, but that won't make any difference with my liking you. Oh, yes—I wanted to ask you—do you know a Mr. Linkhaw?"

Vestalia looked blankly at her interrogator for a moment, then flushed a little and smiled confusedly. "I have heard the name," she replied, "but I have never seen the gentleman bearing it."

Adele drew her brows together in a half-frown. "He is a great friend of the gentleman who was with you at the Museum," she said, doubtingly.

"Yes, I gathered that," answered Vestalia. "It was in that way that I heard the name."

"Really, how curiously we two are mixed up together!" cried the other, with dawning

impatience. "You could tell me ever so many things that I am dying to know, if you only chose to. It is provoking to have to grope about in the dark like this. And you won't even get vexed with me, and talk back. Even that way I might learn something—and we could make it up afterward, as easy as not."

"Ah, but that is what I came resolved under no circumstances to do," explained Vestalia, with affable placidity. "Nothing would tempt me to get vexed with you."

"Suppose I insisted upon talking unpleasantly about the gentleman at the Museum," suggested Adele, with potential malice in her tone.

"I don't say you can't grieve me and hurt me, but you can't make me angry with you. You see, I know things which you don't know, which would entirely alter your views about me, and about other matters, if you were aware of them. So it would be unfair in me to blame you for remarks made in ignorance of the truth."

"But it is precisely against this ignorance

that I protest with all my might!" said Adele with vehemence. "It is that that is unfair. It makes me ridiculous."

"I don't see the sense of it myself," agreed Vestalia, simply. "I always thought it would be the simplest course to tell you everything at once. Or no—what have I said?" she hastened to add, in deprecation of the other's kindling eye; "I didn't feel that way at first. It was I who originally suggested that you shouldn't be told, at the start. I *was* afraid of you, you know. But now I feel quite differently. I would gladly have you know everything—but your father has other views. It is his secret, now, much more than it is mine. I don't think there is any reason why I shouldn't tell you that much."

"Oh-h!" groaned Adele, in wrath at her helplessness. "Well, tell me this, anyway, how long is this tomfoolery to be kept up?"

"No, don't ask me," answered Vestalia, sympathetically at last. "I don't know. I can only say that I'm as tired of it now as you

are. I wish you would believe that. It would make me easier in my mind."

"Well, I do believe it, then," the dark girl replied, with impulsive readiness. "Oh, and something occurs to me that I daresay you *can* tell me. You remember the day at the Museum. Well, the gentleman who was with you called here next day, papa having in the meantime seen you secretly, downstairs. Now, papa seemed clearly annoyed with that gentleman, when he came up and found him here. Now, why was that?"

Vestalia reflected. It was evident enough that the question honestly puzzled her. "All I can think of," she replied, after consideration, "is that your father had taken it for granted that this gentleman was my husband —and when it came out in our interview that he wasn't then your father questioned me very closely about him, and it happened that it was a subject upon which I couldn't very well tell him much, and I daresay he formed an unfavourable opinion of Mr. Mosscrop on that account. That is the only explanation I can

think of. I know he said he thought it would be well for me not to see him again, or even hold communication with him—but I did write him a letter that very day all the same."

It was Adele's turn to ponder. "But why," she began, hesitatingly, "why should papa take it upon himself to tell you what to do and not to do? What business is it of his? And, if he disliked the thing, why should he remain friendly to you, and snub the gentleman you call Mr. Mosscrop? Not that he minded it, or that it amounted to anything, but it puzzles me that papa should behave in that curious fashion."

"Yes, it would have been more natural to show the woman the cold shoulder, and think nothing amiss of the man," assented Vestalia, gravely. "I quite agree with you there."

"Well, that *is* the way of the world, isn't it?" put in Adele, in apologetic tones. "Don't dream that I suggest anything wrong."

"Oh no," said the other patiently, but with a note of weariness in her voice. "It doesn't matter, one way or the other."

"You love him, then?" Adele's black eyes glowed with a sudden kindly warmth which went to Vestalia's heart."

"Oh, how can I tell you?" she faltered. "It is all so stupid—and I am so unhappy? He was goodness itself to me, and he must think that I behaved like a brute—a common girl of the streets—or meaner still, for at least it's said they have *some* sense of gratitude. He came like Providence itself to help me, when I was absolutely starving and turned out of doors like a dog—and I *was* grateful, and yet here he must be thinking that I'm the very scum of the earth!"

She gazed at her companion out of swimming eyes, and for answer Adele kissed her.

"I will go now," she stammered, hastily, as if the caress had further unnerved her. "I've stayed longer than I meant. Yes, I will come again—if you tell your father that I've been, and he says I may come."

"I'd like to see him say anything else!" cried the young lady from Paris, Kentucky. "The idea!"

And when the door had closed upon Vestalia, this dark beauty clenched her hands, and strode indignantly about the room, and repeated between set teeth, "The very idea!"

CHAPTER XI.

VESTALIA paused at the street entrance of the hotel, and looked doubtfully up the hill toward the shifting outline of the strident, crowded Strand.

The prospect repelled her, and she bent her slow steps in the other direction. Crossing the empty, sun-baked roadway of the Embankment, she strolled westward in the partial shade of the young lime-trees, which maintain a temerarious existence along the line of the river's parapet.

She looked over the stonework to the water from time to time as she walked, and every glance instinctively wandered up-stream toward the stretch of Westminster Bridge, poised delicately in the noonday haze across the body of the sleepy flood. The stately beauty of the

opposing piles of buildings which it linked one with the other, and brought together into the loftiest picture the Old World knows, came as she moved toward it to soothe and uplift her spirits. Her lips parted with pleasure at the spectacle, and at the thought that there, in that glorious span between St. Thomas' and St. Stephen's, her own romance had been born.

The warm serenity of the scene, the inimitable composure of its vast parts, lying under the sunshine in such majestic calm, seemed to chide the weak flutterings and despondencies to which she had surrendered her bosom. The romance which absorbed her mind, of which, indeed, her whole being had become a portion, had its home there, in the heart of that benignant grandeur. The grace and charm and noble strength of what she gazed upon rebuked her timid want of confidence in Destiny, as it shapes itself on Westminster Bridge. She walked forward with a firmer step, her head up, and her eyes drying themselves by the radiance of their own glance.

And so, being borne along by the powerful spell which this great vista has cast about her, she had no sense of surprise when it caught up also David Mosscrop in its train, and placed him at her side. It was at the corner of the bridge, and a momentary clustering of pedestrians brought to a stand-still by a policeman's uplifted hand had diverted her thoughts, and then someone touched her on the arm.

She turned and drank in what had happened with tranquil, tenderly self-possessed eyes. She gave no start, as of a mind caught unawares. She was conscious of no wonder, no tremor of disturbance at the unexpected. The luminous regard in which she embraced the newcomer was as unreasoningly ready for him as are the spontaneous raptures of dreamland. No words came to her lips, but it was in the air that she had known he was coming.

"I was just going to hunt a fellow up at his club across there," said Mosscrop, his coarser masculine sense suggesting an explana-

tion, "and I chanced to look over here, and I made sure it was you, and——"

He stopped short too, and the slower fires kindled in the glance which met hers. They looked into each other's eyes, in a long moment of silence. He drew her arm in his, while the glamour of this sustained gaze rested still upon them. Then, with a lengthened happy sigh she spoke.

"I want to go again to that dear little place where we breakfasted," she said softly. "You must let me have my own way. I have money in my purse, now, and you must come and lunch with me. And it must be—oh, it *must* be there."

They drove thither, this time in a high-hung, sumptuous, noiseless hansom, which sped with an entranced absence of motion through the busy streets.

"It is like fairyland again," she whispered, nestling against him in the narrow, deeply-padded enclosure. And he, resting his hand upon hers under the shelter of the closed doors, breathed heavily, and mur-

mured a cadence without words in ecstatic response.

In some ridiculous fraction of time they were at their journey's end. The impression of having travelled on a magic carpet was in their minds as, almost ruefully, they woke from their day-dream of arrow-flight through space, stepped out, and paid the cabman. They laughed together at the thought, without necessity of mentioning what amused them. Vestalia, before they entered the restaurant, drew her companion a few doors up the street, and halted before the narrow window of the old French bootmaker's shop. Here they laughed again, he merrily, she with a lingering, mellow aftermath of feeling in her tone.

It was only when they were seated in the little room above and she had drawn off her gloves, and after a joyous insistence upon doing it all herself, had chosen some dishes from the card and sent the waiter off with the order, that their tongues were loosened.

David leaned back in his chair, and beamed

broad content. He began to talk in the measured, smooth-flowing tone which she remembered so well. "First of all, dear girl," he said, "I want to put on the record my boundless delight at finding you once more. I take off my hat to the gods. They have devised in my behalf a boon which swallows up all the imaginable ills of a lifetime. I swear to complain of nothing they do for the rest of my days. They have given you back to me; and if I am dull enough to lose you again, why, I will bow my head submissively to the deserved mishaps of an ass."

The girl's blue eyes twinkled with a soft, glad light. "It is a great joy to hear your voice again," she said, gently. "The echoes of it have kept up a little faint murmur in my ears ever since we parted, as if some spirit was holding a phantom shell close to my head. And now it is as if we hadn't parted at all, isn't it?—I mean, for the present."

"Ah, it matters so little what you mean," he replied, in affectionate banter. "I erred once, to my profound misfortune, in deferring

to your mental processes, and permitting them to translate themselves into actions. Do not think that I shall be so weak again. The key shall never fail to be turned on you hereafter."

She laughed gaily, and shook her head in playful defiance. "Ah, but suppose——" she began, and then let a glance of merry archness complete her sentence.

"I confess to curiosity," he said. "I should prize highly your conception of the motives which prompted you to run away from me."

Her mood sobered perceptibly. "I did it because it was right."

"As a mainspring of human action, that is inadequate," he commented. "Almost all painful and embarrassing things are right, but wise people avoid them as much as possible none the less."

"No, it was right for me to go," she persisted. "I couldn't stay and be dependent upon someone else, no matter who that someone else was. Your kindness to me that whole

day was more grateful to me than you can think. I was so frightened in that early morning there on the bridge, so desolate and helpless and sick with dread of what was going to become of me, that I didn't dream of hesitating to take shelter in your—your friendship. It was like going under some hospitable roof while there was a drenching rain outside, and I was very thankful for the refuge. But when it cleared up, I couldn't go on staying, just because I had been made welcome, now, could I?"

"Since you ask me, I declare with tearful emphasis that you could."

"No, seriously," urged Vestalia; "don't you agree with me that women should be just as self-reliant and independent as men?"

"Me? I agree absolutely. I would have women insist upon the most unflinching independence, all the world over. I feel so keenly on that point, that out of the entire sex I would make only one exception. Very few people would take such an advanced position as that, I imagine. Just fancy how far I go!

There are hundreds of millions of women, and I would have them all independent but just one. By a curious accident it happens that you are that one—but you will be fair-minded enough to recognise, I feel convinced, that this is the merest chance."

She made a droll little mouth at him, and he went on:

"Yes, it is very strange. I cannot pretend to account for it, but you do undoubtedly form an exception to what would otherwise be a universal rule. The thought of other women earning their own living fills me with joy. I am fascinated by it, I assure you. I feel like bursting into song at the barest suggestion of the idea. But this very excess of reverence for the general principle begets a corresponding vehemence of feeling about the one solitary exception. That is in accordance with a natural law. Surely you respect natural laws? Well, the vaguest adumbration of an idea of your doing things for yourself convulses me with rage. The notion that my right to take entire charge of you is disputed seems mon-

strous and abominable to me. It is a denial of my mission on earth, and I am bound to combat it with all my powers."

Vestalia smiled. "I see what you mean. You are just an old prehistoric savage like the rest of your sex. Your one idea is to drag a woman off into your cave and keep her there, with a big rock rolled up in front of the door when you're away."

"I would not have you disparage the primitive instincts," urged Mosscrop, with an air of solemnity. "My word for it, we should be an extraordinarily uninteresting lot without them. They are the abiding bone and flesh and muscle of humanity, upon which it pleases each foolish generation in turn to stretch its own thin, trivial pelt of fashionable convention. My desire to seize you, and drag you off to my own cave, and make a life's business of keeping you there, always beautiful, always happy, always replenishing the well-spring of joy in my existence—you choose that as something typical of the primeval man surviving within me. Let me tell you, sweet little Ves-

talia, that the human mind would cease to-morrow from its eternal wistful dream of progress if it were not for the hope that advancing civilisation will bring improved facilities for that sort of thing. The world would wilt, and curl up like a sapless leaf, and drop from its solar stem into gaseous space, if that anticipation were taken away. The race keeps itself going only by cherishing the faith that sometime, somewhere in the golden future, this planet will be arranged so that the right woman will always get into the right cave. That is what people mean when they speak of the millennium."

"That is all very well," said Vestalia, "but it deals with everything from the man's point of view. Consider the other side of the case. What do you say to the woman's disinclination for cave-life—is that not entitled to respect?"

"Possibly," answered David, reflectively—"if one were able to believe in it."

The waiter entered at this point with a burdened tray in his arms, and Vestalia took up the wine list. "Which is it that we had—

that in the lovely high green bottles, with arms like a vase?" she asked Mosscrop. "We must have the same again."

"You have told me nothing as yet," said David, reproachfully, when they were alone again, "of all the thousand things I long to know."

"It is so hard to tell," she explained, with hesitation. "That is, there are things that I am supposed not to tell to anybody, at present, at least. And as for what I ought not to tell *you*—why I have been instructed to avoid you altogether. I was even told not to write you—but I did all the same—just once."

David took a crumpled envelope from an inner pocket over his heart, held it up for her inspection, and replaced it. But even as he did so sombre shadows began to gather on his face. He laid down his knife and fork, and, biting his lips, looked out of the window.

Vestalia swiftly recalled gruesome associations with that look. She stretched forth her hand, and laid it on his arm. "You mustn't look out there," she protested. "It has a bad

effect on you. Look me in the face instead—please!"

He shook his head impatiently, and stared with dogged, blinking eyes at the opposite roofs. "You don't realise what it has all meant to me," he said at last, his gaze still averted. The quaver in his voice profoundly affected the girl.

"Listen to me—David," she said, with something of his pathos reflected in her tone. "Turn and look at me. I haven't the heart for even a moment of misunderstanding to-day. There isn't anything on earth I won't tell you. But you must look at me!"

He slowly obeyed her, and she saw that there were tears in his eyes. "But apparently there are things which it would be merciful not to tell me," he said, struggling for an instant for composure. Then his brows knitted themselves, and flashes played in the darkness of his glance. "Who forbids you this or that?" he demanded, the angry metallic growl rising in his voice. "Four days ago you were all alone in the world! You told me so! In

detail you assured me of your isolation. What are you talking about now? You speak of receiving instructions—to avoid me altogether, to write no letter to me! Oh, I ask for no explanations——" he went on stormily, pushing back his chair to rise from the table—"don't think I claim any right to question you. But I find myself mistaken, that is all! I am a silly duffer at a game of this sort. I take things in earnest, while the others are laughing in their sleeves. Well, I've had my lesson. Before God, I'll never——"

Vestalia screamed at him. She had half-risen in her place, gazing with bewildered, affrighted eyes, till some vague inkling of his meaning dawned upon her brain. "Foolish David! Foolish!" she cried aloud now. "Stop it! Stop it! You don't know what you're saying! Keep still, and let me talk to you!"

She bent across the table, and peremptorily shook his shoulder to enforce her words. "You're all wrong!" she clamoured, as his tempest of wrathful words subsided. Upon

the silence which followed she implanted firmly the added comment: "Oh, you goose!"

He looked up sullenly to her, as she stood now erect—and, meeting the glance in her eyes, felt himself clinging to it. There was for him the effect of sunshine in it—of clouds parted, of radiance and calm restored about him. Breathing hard, he gazed into her face, and came somehow to know from what he saw in it that he had been making a fool of himself. This perception assumed sharp outlines in his mind before she had spoken a word.

"Now, will you behave yourself, and listen to me?" she demanded, with austerity. His shattered aspect of contrition was a sufficient answer, and she seated herself confidently. "Now I will explain things to you—although you don't deserve it in the very least," she began, in formal tones. "To commence with, you remember that American father and daughter that we met at the Museum, down in the basement?—well, it happened that—hap-

pened that—Oh, my poor boy, how *could* you think so stupidly of me?"

David had drawn up to his place again. He held Vestalia's hands in his at this juncture, somehow, and the enchanted table narrowed itself until there was no barrier of space between their lips.

The little kiss sweetened the air. The two, even while they exchanged a glance of shy surprise, thought of it with reverence. They instinctively gave to its contemplation a moment of tender silence.

"How shrewd you were in discerning my leaven of savagery," he remarked at last. "Or leaven? we'd better say principal ingredient!"

"I like you that way," said Vestalia, quietly.

He smiled at her in dreamy incredulity. "I wonder if you do," he mused. "They say women do like men who beat them. The police courts seem to support the idea. But there is a difficulty, you see. If you liked me because I behaved badly to you, then I should

dislike you on precisely that account. So you mustn't suggest approbation. No, I was very rude and stupid, and I am profoundly ashamed of myself. I should be ashamed to offer an excuse, too, if it were not just the one it is. I happen to be head over heels in love with you, dear little lady."

"And precisely what is that an excuse for?" demanded the girl, with a fine show of ingenuous calm.

"For letting my luncheon get cold," he replied, taking up his fork.

With the laughter of pleased children, they resumed the broken course of the meal.

"It doesn't begin to be as nice as *your* breakfast," she commented after a little.

"I don't think it is a day for things to eat," he said, pushing the plate aside. "I want to do nothing but just look at you—perhaps talk a little—but hear you talk much more. I am conscious of an indefinite hunger for the mere visual charm of you, sitting there opposite me. It seems as if it would take years to satisfy that alone. Do you know that

you are very beautiful, dear, in your new clothes?"

She regarded his face with a keen, almost anxious glance, before she let the softer look dominate her own. "I am going to hurry to tell you where I got them," she said. "They are the gift of my uncle—my father's brother. This was what I was beginning to explain when—when you got so unhappy."

"Yes—that is the merciful word—unhappy," he assented, with gratitude. "I have been deeply out of sorts—mentally—since I lost you that night. There is a special devil inside of me, Vestalia, who sometimes lies low for long periods, and hardly reminds me of his existence, but since last Thursday he has been out on the war-path, night and day. My nerves are stretched like fiddle-strings, just with the effort of holding him. The sight of you is death to him, dear. He is gone now—clean out of existence. And while you stay, he won't return. But the wretch has left me tired and a little tremulous. I want to rest myself by just looking at you."

She, smiling with demure pleasure at his speech and his look, related to him briefly the story of the Skinner pedigree. "It occurred to me the minute I woke up in the early morning," she declared. "I shall always believe that I really dreamed it first. Are you interested in dreams?"

"Oh immensely—at the time."

"No; but there *is* something in them. I assure you, the idea never entered my head the day we met them. But before I was fairly awake next morning, lo, there it was, all worked out. The old gentleman was politeness itself. He came down immediately, when I sent my note upstairs. When I told him about wanting to make a pedigree of the Skinners, the notion appealed to him at once. Then I told him about something else, and that appealed to him a good deal more."

Vestalia paused here, and began to regard her companion with signs of diminishing confidence. "I can't go any farther without making a most humiliating confession to you," she faltered.

"Then don't go any farther, I beseech you," he answered. "Truly, I do not find myself stirred very much by this entire demonstration of your ability to do things off your own bat. It is independent and praiseworthy and all that, no doubt, but I still have a lingering feeling that you ought to have stayed to breakfast, you know, and left mere commercial details to me. And I certainly shrink from humiliating confessions. Skip the unpleasant parts. We will have no skeletons at our feast to-day."

"Ah, but they can't be skipped," sighed Vestalia. She drew nearer to him, across the table, and lowered her voice. "I foolishly told you some things that were not so—that first morning," she confided in doleful tones. "It was a kind of romance about myself that I had built up in my own mind, and without much thought I gave it to you as truth. So long as I kept it to myself it did no harm; it even made life easier and more endurable for me, like a poor child making-believe that she and her rag doll are princesses. But it was differ-

ent to tell you. My father was not a French gentleman. He was not an officer, and he wasn't killed in a duel. He was never in France any more than I was. My mother *was* Scotch, but she did not belong to any noble or wealthy family. She did not leave any family jewels with a crest on them, and no one cheated her out of a private fortune, because she never had such a thing. It was just my individual fairyland that I described to you as real. I didn't even tell you my true name."

David smiled solace upon her distressed aspect. "You speak as if it were of importance. Dear child, do we value a rare and beautiful lily the less, because the gardener has put the wrong label on it by mistake? Tut—tut! Names and lineage and all that—it is the idlest stuff on earth to me. The story that you told me was pleasant in my ears only because it came from your lips. The discovery now that it was *all* yours—that it was not the mere recital of dull facts, but was the child of your own inner imaginings—why that only makes it the more delightful to me. I simply

gave it store-room in my memory before; I love it now—and at the same time I find I have quite forgotten it. There is a paradox for you!"

Vestalia essayed a smile through her tears. "You are always kinder than even I expect you to be," she faltered; "but I did tell you a —a story, and by rights you should be very angry with me."

David laughed. "Hans Christian Andersen told me many stories, but I worshipped him increasingly to the end. Dear lady, the stories are the only veritable things in life. The alleged realities of existence pass by us, or roll over us, and leave us colourless and empty. The genuine possessions of our souls — the things that shape and decorate and furnish our spiritual habitations—are the things that never happened. I note a twinkle in your eye. You fancy that I have said an inept thing. You think that I shall have to go back and explain that at least what has happened to us forms an exception to the rule. Ah, sweet little Vestalia, have you forgotten your own

remark, here in this very room? 'It isn't like real life at all,' you said; 'it is the way things happen in fairy tales.' I take my stand upon that definition. We have deliberately repudiated what are described as the realities of life. We discard them, cut them dead, decline to have anything whatever to do with them. We declare that it is fairyland that we are living in, and that we refuse to come out of it to the end of our days."

Vestalia gazed into his eyes with wistful tenderness. "To the end of our days!" she murmured softly, wonderingly. Then she recalled the task still unfinished. "I took the name of Peaussier," she forced herself to continue, "because it was a translation of my own name. I looked in the dictionary, and found that it was the French for Skinner."

David lifted his brows. "You don't mean ——" he began, confusedly.

"Yes;" she forestalled his question. "The old gentleman at the Savoy is my father's own brother. My father was Abram Skinner. He was not a lucky man, or, in his later years, a

very nice man either. He was always poor, and toward the end he was in other troubles too. My home was a thing to shudder at the recollection of. I ran away from it after mother died, and he's gone, too, now. I changed the name, to wash my hands of the whole miserable thing. And then to think of the wonderful chance—to stumble upon my own uncle, a man of fortune and education, and the kindest heart alive—is it not the most extraordinary thing that ever happened in this world?"

"Very possibly it might be regarded as extraordinary—out in the so-called world," David assented, reflectively. "But it is just the thing that would be expected in fairyland. Yes, it seems, on the face of it, a beneficent occurrence. It is good for you to be seized and possessed of a rich uncle—from some points of view. But from others—a doubt suggests itself, Vestalia, whether your uncle is well-affected toward the fairies. Standard Oil does not lend itself without an effort to the fantastic. What if your uncle beckons you to come forth from fairyland?"

"And leave you behind—is that what you mean?" asked Vestalia, slowly. "That would depend—depend on how much you wanted me to stay."

David put out his left hand to take hers, where it lay upon the cloth. With his right he drew out his watch. "The name Skinner," he said, "is all right for the folk at the Savoy. It is not a suitable name for you. I sympathise fully with your impulse to abandon it. The expedient which you adopted was, no doubt, the best that offered itself at the moment, but I think I know a better. I must leave you now, and hurry into the City. This is Monday. Dear love, on Thursday I claim the whole day from you. We will breakfast here at eight—it is not too early, is it?—or say rather that at just eight I will come and find you on Westminster Bridge. The day must begin there, mustn't it? And—strangely enough—Thursday is in a sort another birthday of mine."

"And of mine too?" she asked, with a light in her eyes.

CHAPTER XII.

In the early afternoon of Thursday, David Mosscrop walked apart on shaded gravel-paths, beneath arches of roses and the feathered canopy of cedars high above, with Adele by his side.

"Oh, it's all right. The waiter will come out and tell us when it is ready," he said reassuringly, in comment upon her backward glance. "I want to speak with you. There was no such thing as a word with you by yourself on the road."

"Why, we talked every mortal minute," she protested.

"Ah yes, we talked, but I don't recall that anything was said."

"I daresay *my* conversation is empty to the last degree," she observed; "but I am usually spared such frank statements of the fact."

"Ah, but I want to be thought of as something a little different from the usual," urged David.

"Your efforts in that direction have been extraordinarily successful. Pray, do not imagine that they are unappreciated. I admit freely that you seem to have quite exhausted the unusual, my Lord."

"No; I've still got something up my sleeve," said David, lightly enough. But the tone in which she had uttered those final two words caught his attention. They carried a suggestion of emphasis which fell outside the bounds of genial banter. Meditating upon it he stole a covert glance at her, and encountered two wide-awake black eyes intently scrutinising him in turn. "It was about that I wished to consult you," he added, conscious of an embarrassed tongue.

"Won't it be better to stick to scenery?" she asked. Yes, there was undoubtedly a mocking touch in her voice. "That is so safe a subject. This dear old hotel here, now, how perfectly satisfying it is! Those wonderful

trees out in front, and the white chalk hill behind, and this garden, and then the comfort and charm of everything inside, and the thought that people have been coming here for hundreds of years, or is it thousands?—it is so different from anything we have in America—even in Kentucky. And then the whole drive from London—through such delicious country, all so rich and smooth and neatly packed together, and so full of the notion that people are all the while planting and pruning and admiring every inch of it that you can't help feeling affectionately toward it yourself! Perhaps there *is* a certain hint of the artificial about it, but somehow that seems rather in keeping with the day than otherwise, doesn't it, my Lord?"

While he hesitated about an answer, she touched him on the arm. "Here are papa and Mr. Linkhaw coming along after us—probably to tell us luncheon is ready. Shan't we wait for them?"

"Heavens, no!" cried David, starting forward. "We've been chained to them on the

top of the coach for two whole hours," he went on, in defensive explanation of his warmth. "Really, we have earned the right to a few quiet words by ourselves."

"Oh, *I* don't mind," said Adele, quickening her pace to suit his. "Only it's fair to warn you, though, that my temper has its limitations. I am a variable person. Sometimes it happens that all at once I weary of a joke, after it has been carried to a certain length, and then I can be as unpleasant as they make 'em."

"I find that my own sense of humour has a tendency to flag under sustained effort, as I get older," said David. "But there are so many pleasantries afloat—perhaps you wouldn't mind indicating the one which particularly fatigues you, and I will put my foot on it at once."

"Oh, by no means! That would be far too crude. We are all your guests, and you are in charge of the entertainment, and I couldn't dream of suggesting anything."

"Except that you find yourself no longer amused," ventured David, cautiously.

"Oh, not at all." She spoke with perfunctory languor, and simulated a little yawn. "I daresay it is all immensely funny, only I got up earlier than usual this morning, and no doubt that has dulled my wits somewhat."

David perceived on the instant how matters stood. "I also rose at an extravagantly early hour," he said, "and it is about my reasons for doing so that I want to tell you. But, first of all, let us be frank with each other. I have done nothing but accede to a situation created for me by Archie and yourself. It has been within your power to end it at any moment you choose. It has been all along much more your joke than mine. It isn't fair to round on me for merely humouring your own conception of sport."

Adele halted momentarily, and surveyed his composed, swarthy countenance with lifted brows. "So you saw all along that *I* knew!" she exclaimed, in honest surprise.

"How could I have imagined that so clumsy a performance as mine would deceive

so clever a young woman?" he rejoined, with a sprightly bow.

"Oh, you did it awfully well," she assured him, complacently. "But tell me, did Archie suspect that *I* knew?"

"I have been intimate with Archie from the cradle," said David, "but I am still very shy about forming opinions as to his mental processes. In this case, however, I think it is safe to say he didn't suspect—and still doesn't suspect."

"Poor old Archie," mused Adele, with a ripening smile. "I knew who he was before I'd even laid eyes on him. A school-friend of mine in Galveston wrote to me that she had met a real Earl, who insisted on being known as Mr. Linkhaw, and that he was returning to England by way of Kentucky. I've had three months of the rarest fun in never letting on that I had the remotest suspicion. You can't imagine how comical it was. He used to get quite tearful sometimes, I abused the aristocracy so fiercely. And then, the joke was, papa began—his whole idea of conversation is to

take up to-day what I've said yesterday, and multiply my words by a hundred and twelve, and produce the result as his own; and he worked up the anti-Earl agitation till Archie very nearly went off into chronic melancholia. It was better than any comedy that ever was written—but then you stumbled your way into the middle of it, and got it all twisted and tangled up—and it hasn't been so amusing since then."

"My dear Miss Skinner," protested David, "I think my entrance upon the scene deserves a gentler verb. If you will search your memory, you will find that I came in by express invitation. It was you who deliberately thrust my mock honours upon me."

"Oh, I know that," she responded, readily enough. "I thought that would only make the thing funnier still—but somehow it hasn't. It isn't anything about Archie and me, you know. But there is another element in the case that I feel very keenly about. It has been puzzling me for days, but I only learned the truth last night. I simply *made* papa tell me.

I refused flat-footed to come here to-day, or to do anything else that was reasonable, unless he *did* tell me. I have a cousin here in England, Mr. Mosscrop, a daughter of my father's own brother, and she is one of the dearest girls that ever lived."

"I can readily credit that," declared David, pointing his meaning with a little inclination of the head.

"Oh, she is far nicer than I am," cried Adele. "*She* wouldn't trifle with the feelings of the man she loved, or play tricks with him just for the sake of fun. In fact, I almost blame her for taking such things too seriously. She hasn't had too easy a time of it, poor girl, and it has made her, *I* think, altogether *too* humble. She met a young man in the midst of her troubles who, it seems, was civil to her, and even kind as men go, and what does she do but just sit down and worship the very memory of him, and cry out her pretty blue eyes over it—and he—he walks off and never gives her another thought. That's the *man* of it!"

A gleam of indignation flashed through the moisture in her own eyes as she bent them upon her companion. Her bosom heaved the more as she discerned a broad smile extending itself upon his face.

"Although I might demur to details," he said, restraining the gaiety which struggled for expression in his voice, "I must not pretend to fail to recognise the portrait you have drawn. I am the guilty man!"

"You laugh at it!" she exclaimed. "To you it seems a joke!"

"Are you so certain that there isn't a joke concealed somewhere about it?" he suggested, calmly.

"I lose patience with you! You make a jest of everything. Tell me this much: Do you or do you not know her present address?"

"I know precisely where she is to be found at the present moment," said David, speaking now with gravity.

"Well, and have you been there to see her? Have you written to her there? Have you given her the slightest sign since she has been

there of any desire on your part to ever see her again?"

"I must answer 'No' to each question, I am afraid," he responded, and had the grace to hang his head.

His evident humility only momentarily impressed her. "I am disappointed in you," she said. "Where will you find a sweeter or truer woman? Don't think I am throwing her at your head! Quite the contrary. If you were to ask for her now, I should advise with all my might against you. But you have behaved like a simpleton. I am going to have her always live with me, or near me. She is my own flesh and blood, and I love her as if she were my sister. She doesn't know, as yet, that I am aware of the relationship; but I have written to her this very morning, telling her to come and see me to-night, when I get back. I am going to spend some money in Scotland."

"It will be profoundly appreciated, believe me."

She sniffed at his interjection. "I intend

to buy land right and left in Elgin, and if Skirl Castle isn't good enough—I don't think much of it from the photographs—we'll build a bigger one, and we'll make that whole section hum; and Vestalia shall be as big an heiress as it contains, and the lucky man who marries her shall be treated like a brother of mine and Archie's. And that is what you have thrown away. I say it to you frankly, because it is all over so far as you are concerned. She will listen to me, and my mind is quite made up—and papa can tell you what *that* means!"

"Even if your decision were not irrevocable," said David, solemnly, "my answer would of necessity be the same. I would do much to please you, but I do not see my way to marrying your cousin."

They had paused to exchange these last sentences, and now upon the instant the Earl and his elderly companion came up. David essayed a revelatory wink to the nobleman, but it fell upon the stony places in Lord Drumpipes wondering stare.

Mr. Skinner wiped his brow decorously,

and breathed appreciation of the halt. "Sir," he began, addressing David, "I must assume that I am enjoying the opportunity of studying a district of England peculiarly favoured by Nature, and exceptionally embellished as well by the hand of man; but I wish to give expression to emotions of unmixed delight at all that I observe about me. We have inspected the internal appointments of the ancient hostelry, and have revelled, sir, in the luxurious yet studiously regulated beauties of this garden, and I confess that the novelty of the one and the charm of the other far surpass anything——"

"Papa," interposed his daughter, with cold severity, "we will leave these gentlemen to enjoy the novelties and charms by themselves for a few minutes, if you please. I have an explanation to make to you, since no one else offers it, and I think it should be no longer deferred."

She took her father's arm as she spoke, and led him in a direct line across the sward toward the broad, low-lying, ivy-clad rear of

the hotel. "Oh, it's all right; they don't mind your walking on the grass in England," the two young men heard her say as she departed.

These partners in deception gazed after her for a space. Then they looked at each other.

"Davie, I don't like it," said the Earl.

"Don't like what?"

"I'm afraid she's got some kind of an inkling. It looks as if a suspicion were dawning in her mind. I warned you she was keen of scent."

Mosscrop burst forth with a peremptory guffaw of laughter. "You duffer of the earth," he cried, "she knew all about you before ever she laid eyes on you!" He unfolded the chuckling narrative forthwith, to the Earl's profound astonishment and concern.

"Why then, man," Drumpipes ejaculated at last, staring hard at the close-cropped lawn, "I can't tell in the least if she loves me for myself alone."

"Oh, you read that in some novel," ob-

jected David. "It's a mere phrase; it has no significance in real life."

"Yes; but," the other pursued, dejectedly, "I don't see how I can make sure that she loves me in any kind of way."

"At all events, she's going to marry you," David re-assured him. "She mentioned the fact to me, casually. And she's going to buy up Elgin right and left, and build a new Skirl Castle as big as Olympia, and generally make everything else north of the Grampians 'sing small'—I believe that's the phrase."

The Earl assimilated this intelligence with a kindling eye. "Man, it's fine!" he cried, as the prospect spread itself out before his mental vision. "Ah, poor Davie, you dinna ken what it is to be in love!"

Mosscrop sighed. "When you talk Scots, Archie," he said, "I know it's going to cost me money. I foresee that you'll kick about the bill. But, hurry, man, and catch up with them. She's quite capable of flouncing out of the house, and dragging her father along, too, while the fit is on her; and that would only

mean more bother to coax them back. Come on!"

He started at a brisk pace in pursuit, and Drumpipes strode eagerly beside him. They overtook their guests on the very threshold of the door, and the Earl called out a breathless, entreating "Adele!" The girl, upon reflection, turned, and surveyed the pair with an austere eye.

"Wait a moment, papa," she said in her coldest tone; "one of these two gentlemen seems to feel authorised to address me by my Christian name, and apparently has also some communication to make to us."

"Well," stammered Drumpipes, hesitatingly, "there's an awfully good luncheon been ordered, you know."

Mosscrop emitted an abrupt, resonant note of laughter, and in the silence which ensued displayed violent muscular efforts to keep a grin from convulsing his face.

Adele preserved the severity of her aspect for a little. "I think it might occur to *you*, Lord Drumpipes," she began, markedly ad-

dressing her remarks to the rightful bearer of the title, "that after what has happened—and on this point, I can assure you my father feels exactly as I do——"

She stopped here, with the effect of appealing to her father for immediate confirmation of their inflexible joint attitude.

"I need scarcely observe," began Mr. Skinner, putting up his *pince-nez* and looking down upon the two young men with sternness from the vantage of the door-step, "that whatever course my daughter deems it consistent with her dignity to pursue, in the face of the extraordinary, and, I may confidently add, unprecedented circumstances which we are called upon to—to confront, has my most unswerving adhesion."

A waiter opened the door inward at this instant, and overlaid Mr. Skinner's peroration with a clear-cut message, Germanic in its non-essentials, but broadly human in import.

The old gentleman gasped, twiddled the string of his glasses in his fingers, and leant his head sidewise toward his daughter. "Yes,

but what *is* it we're going to do?" he inquired in a nervous whisper.

"Do?" cried Mosscrop, who had caught her glance in his own, and convicted it of latent merriment, "Do? Why we're going to laugh at a harmless pleasantry happily ended, and pass in to luncheon."

"Yes, papa," said Adele, upon consideration, and with a dawning smile upon her lips, "I think that *is* what we're going to do."

When they found themselves standing about the table in the private room, overlooking through open French windows the delightful sunlit garden from which they had come, Mosscrop seized the moment of hesitation about seats to hold up his hand. Though he had been bereft of his borrowed dignities, the air of natural command sat easily upon him.

"I have to ask you for a minute or two of delay," he said. "It will explain itself."

He wrote something on a card as he spoke, and gave it to the waiter with a closely-guarded whisper of injunction. As the servant left the

room, David turned to the others with a radiant face.

"Mr. Skinner," he began, "and my younger friends, there is a toast which in England is always drunk standing. It occurs to me to propose it to you, on this single occasion, before we have taken our seats at all. As has been remarked with characteristic perspicacity, the circumstances which we find ourselves called upon to confront are extraordinary in character, and altogether unprecedented. Through the courtesy of my friends, I have for a brief period had devolved upon me the responsibility of behaving, at stated intervals, as a member of the Scotch peerage should behave. I view my deportment throughout this ordeal, in retrospect, with a considerable degree of satisfaction. I have spared no pains to realise my conception of the part. The essential thing about a successful peerage, I take it, is that it should be invested, for ordinary eyes, with a glamour of unreality. A Baron should be perceptibly romantic. A Viscount, if he respects his station should

quite envelope himself in the mists of the improbable. As for an Earl, he should live frankly in fairyland. My imagination does not run to Marquises and Dukes, but I think I may say I have grasped the ideal of an Earl."

"The true ideal of an Earl," interposed Drumpipes, with inspiration, "is never to let victuals get cold."

Mosscrop smiled and nodded. "Only a minute more," he said. "I spoke about fairyland. I have been under its spell all this week. I have committed myself to its charm for the rest of my days. When you return to London this evening, northward, it is Archie who will drive you. I go southward to the Loire country instead, under the magic of the enchantment which beckons and guides and propels me, all in one. To quit riddles, good people, you will notice that there is a fifth place laid here before us. To connect this fact with the toast, the seat is waiting for *my* Queen. This is Sherry, decanted from the 'Anchor's' oldest bin. I suggest to you the filling of your glasses."

He moved toward the door as he spoke, opened it, and turned to the others, with Vestalia on his arm.

"Mr. Skinner," he said gently. "We crave your approbation for what we have done. We were married by the registrar of St. Dunstan's at ten o'clock this morning, and your niece came on here direct by train, bringing her luggage and my own, which I thank God devoutly will always travel together in future. We love each other very, very much."

There fell here upon the masculine vision the spectacle of two women entwined in each other's arms, and of two beautiful heads, one raven-black, one glowing like light through clouded amber, bent tenderly together. The sound of little moans proceeded from this swaying, interlocked group, and then of kisses and of subdued ecstatic sobbing laughter.

Lord Drumpipes, staring vacantly from these women to his boyhood friend, gulped his sherry in an absent-minded way. David, in rapid whispers, outlined meanwhile the situation to his bewildered ear.

"Eh!" he called out at last. "It is the same lassie? The yellow-haired one? The one who smashed my moosie?"

"Shut up, you loon!" growled David fiercely, under his breath. "Is this the time to blab about such things? *I* kicked your your old cow into splinters, and I'll serve the rest of the idiotic show the same way if you mention the word 'moose.' Chuck it, man! That's a thing for the girls to tell each other a year hence, perhaps. Have some delicacy about you!" He turned to Mr. Skinner, who stood as one petrified, his gaze riveted upon the young women.

"I've been explaining to my friend, Lord Drumpipes," David said, lifting his voice, "the romantic nature of my acquaintance with your niece, my wife. I think you have been told about it."

Mr. Skinner shifted his glance to the speaker. "To some extent—to some extent," he murmured weakly. "It has taken me greatly by surprise. I scarcely know——"

David had advanced, and was holding out

his hand, with a confident, masterful sort of smile.

"I suppose it's all right," the old gentleman said, sending confused, appealing glances toward his inattentive daughter. "Adele seems not to object—I take it for granted that——"

Adele lifted her head, and drew a protecting arm round Vestalia. "Hold up your chin," she whispered, audibly. "They're nothing to be frightened of. You know everybody except your cousin Archie, and he's only to be feared by creatures who can't shoot back."

The bride, nestling against the other's shoulder, raised a luminous face, and looked about her with a smile of frank happiness. "Frightened?" she queried, and then shook her fair head joyously in answer.

The waiter came in with the tureen.

THE END.

GLORIA MUNDI

TO MY FRIEND

THE HON. ALTON B. PARKER

CHIEF JUDGE OF THE COURT

OF APPEALS, N. Y.

PART I

CHAPTER I

The meeting of the man and the woman—it is to this that every story in the world goes back for its beginning.

At noon on a day late in September the express train from Paris rested, panting and impatient, on its brief halt in the station at Rouen. The platform was covered with groups of passengers, pushing their way into or out of the throng about the victualer's table. Through the press passed waiters, bearing above their heads trays with cups of tea and plates of food. People were climbing the high steps to the carriages, or beckoning to others from the open windows of compartments. Four minutes of the allotted five had passed. The warning cries of the guards had begun, and there was even to be heard the ominous preliminary tooting of a horn.

At the front of the section of first-class carriages a young woman leaned through the broad window-frame of a coupé, and held a

difficult conversation with one of the waiters. She had sandwiches in one hand, some loose coin in the other. Her task was to get at the meaning of a man who spoke of sous while she was thinking in centimes, and she smiled a little in amused vexation with herself at the embarrassment.

"Deux sandwich: combien si vous plait, monsieur?" she repeated, with an appealing stress of courtesy. More slowly she constructed a second sentence: "Est un franc assez?" She proffered the silver coin to help out her inquiry, and the waiter, nodding, put up his hand for it.

On the instant, as the noise of slamming doors and the chorus of "Au coupé, s'il-v'-plait!" grew peremptory, one in authority pushed the waiter aside and pulled open the coupé door upon which she had been leaning. "Permettez moi, madame!" he said curtly.

Close at his back was a young man, with wraps upon his arm and a traveling bag in his hand, who was flushed and breathing hard with the excitement of hurry, and who drew a long sigh of relief as he put his foot on the bottom step of the coupé.

The young woman had grasped the door and was striving stoutly to drag it to her. "Mais non, monsieur!" she shouted, her voice quivering with vehemence. "Cette

compartement est tout reserveé—engageé! J'ai donné sank franc soisante, en Paris, pour moi seulement! Je proteste!"

Sharp blasts from a horn at the rear of the train broke in upon her earnest if uncertain remarks. The official held up one warning hand, while with the other he wrenched the door wide open. He said something of which the girl comprehended only its arbitrary harshness of spirit. Brusquely thrusting a ticket into the young man's hand, he pushed him up the steps into the compartment, and closed the door upon him with a clang. Arms were waving outside; the tin horn screamed; a throb of reawakened energy thrilled backward through the train.

"I assure you—I am so sorry," the young man began, still standing by the door. His voice was gentle and deprecatory. His words were English, but the tone was of some other language.

"But I have taken the whole compartment—I paid for it all!" she burst out at him, her voice shaking with indignation. "It is an outrage!"

"I am afraid you are mistaken," he started to speak again; "you obtained only one seat—I have a ticket for another. If there had been time, I beg you to believe—"

The train was moving, and a swift plunge

into utter darkness abruptly broke off his speech. After a few moments it became possible to discern vague outlines in the black compartment. The girl had huddled herself on the end cushion at the right. The young man took his seat in the corner to the left, and for three incredibly protracted minutes the tunnel reared its uncanny barrier of bogus night between them. The dim suggestion of light which remained to them revealed constrained and motionless figures drawn rigidly away from each other, and pale averted countenances staring fixedly into the gloom.

All at once they were blinking in a flood of sunshine, and drawing welcome breaths of the new, sweet air which swept through from window to window. The young man's gaze, decorously turned to his left, was of a sudden struck with the panorama as by a blow. He uttered a little cry of delight to himself, and bent forward with eagerness to grasp as much as he might of what was offered. The broad, hill-rimmed basin of the Seine; the gray towers and shining spires of the ancient town; the blue films of smoke drifting through the autumn haze; the tall black chimneys, the narrow, high poplars, the splashes of vivid color with which the mighty moving picture painted itself—all

held him, rapt and trembling, with his face out of the window.

Summarily the darkness descended upon them again. He drew back, settled himself in his seat and recalled the circumstance that he was not alone. It occurred to him to pull up the window, and then instinctively he turned to see if she had taken the same precaution on her side. Thus when the short second tunnel unexpectedly ended, he found himself regarding his companion with wide-eyed and surprised intentness.

There were two vacant seats between them, and across this space she returned his scrutiny for a moment; then with a fine show of calm she looked away, out through the broad, rounded panes which constituted the front of the compartment.

To the eye of the young man, she was above all things English. Her garments, her figure, the pose of her head, the consciously competent repose of her profile, the very angle at which the correct gray hat, with its fawn-colored ribbon, crossed the line of the brow above—these spoke loudly to him of the islander. From this fact alone would be inferred a towering personal pride, and an implacable resentment toward those who, no matter how innocently and accidentally, offered injury to that pride. He knew the

English well, and it hardly needed this partial view of her face to tell him that she was very angry.

Another young man, under these conditions, might have more frankly asked himself whether the face was a beautiful one. He was conscious that the query had taken shape in his mind, but he gave it no attention. It was the character of the face, instead, which had powerfully impressed him. He recalled with curious minuteness the details of his first glimpse of it—the commanding light in the gray eyes, the tightened curves of the lip, the mantling red on the high, smooth cheek. Was it a pretty face? No—the question would not propound itself. Prettiness had nothing to do with the matter. The personality which looked through the face—that was what affected him.

The compartment seemed filled in some subtle way with the effect of this personality. He looked out of his window again. A beautiful deep valley lay below him now, with densely wooded hills beyond. The delicate tints of the waning season enriched the tracery of foliage close at hand; still the tall chimneys, mixed with poplars, marked the course of the enslaved river, but the factories themselves were kindly hidden here by dark growths of thicket in the shadowed depths.

It was surpassingly beautiful, but its contemplation left him restless. He moved about on his seat, partially lowered the window, put it up again and at last turned his head.

"I am afraid that all the charming landscape is on this side," he made bold to say. "I will change places with pleasure, if—if you would be so kind."

"No, thank you," was her spontaneous and decisive reply. Upon reflection she added in a more deliberate tone: "I should be obliged if you would take the view that conversation is not necessary."

Some latent strain of temerity amazed the young man by rising to the surface of his mind, under the provocation of this rebuff, and shaping his purpose for him.

"It is only fair to myself, first, however," he with surprise heard himself declaring, "that I should finish my explanation. You can satisfy yourself readily at Dieppe that your ticket is for only one seat. It is very easy to make errors of that kind when one does not—that is to say, is not—well, *entirely* familiar with the language of the country. As to my own part, you will remember that I came only at the last moment. I took my coupé seat a half hour before, because I also wished to be alone, and then I went out to

see Jeanne d'Arc's tower again, and I was nearly too late. If there had been time, I would have found a seat elsewhere—but you yourself saw—"

"Really, I think no more need be said," broke in his companion. She looked him frankly, coldly in the face as she spoke, and her words seemed in his ears to have metallic edges. "It is plain enough that there was a mistake. As you have suggested, my French is very faulty indeed, and no doubt the misunderstanding is entirely my own. So, since it is unavoidable, there surely need be no more words about it."

She opened a book at this, put her feet out to the stool in front and ostentatiously disposed herself for deep abstraction in literature.

The young man in turn got out some pamphlets and papers from the pockets of his great-coat, and pretended to divide his attention between these and the scenery outside. In truth, he did not for a moment get the face of this girl out of his thoughts. More than ever now, since she had looked him fully in the eye, it was not a face to be pictured in the brain as other faces of women had been. The luminous substance of the individuality behind the face shone out at him from the pages he stared at, and from the

passing vistas of lowland meadows, streams and mill-towns that met his gaze through the window.

He knew so little of women that his mind was quite devoid of materials for any comparative analysis of the effect she produced upon him. He evolved for himself, indeed, the conviction that really this was the first woman, in the genuine and higher meaning of the word, that he had ever met. The recognition of this brought with it an excitement as novel to him as the fact itself. Before ever he had seen her, clinging to the coupé door with her gloved hands and so bravely doing hopeless and tongue-tied battle with the guard, there had been things which had made this the greatest day of his life. He was in truth finishing the last stage of a journey into the unknown, the strange possibilities of which had for a week kept his nerves on the rack. The curtain of only one more night hung now between him and the revealed lineaments of destiny. To be alone with his perturbed thoughts, on this culminating day of anxious hopes and dreads, had been his controlling idea at Rouen. It was for this that he had bought the coupé seat, upon the rumor of the station that solitude was thus to be commanded. And now how extraordinary was the chance!

There had stepped into this eventful day, as from the clouds, a stranger whose mysterious appeal to his imagination seemed more remarkable than all else combined.

He worked this out, painstakingly, with little sidelong glances from time to time toward where she sat buried in her book, to check the progression of his reasoning. When he reached the conclusion that she was really playing this predominant part in the drama of the day, its suggestion of hysterical folly rather frightened him. He looked with earnestness out of the window, and even began to count the chimneys of the landscape as an overture to returning sanity. Then he looked less furtively at her and said to himself with labored plausibility that she was but an ordinary traveling Englishwoman, scarcely to be differentiated from the Cook's-tourist type that he knew so well; she had not even a governess' knowledge of French, and there had been nothing in her words and tone with him to indicate either mental distinction or kindliness of temper. Why should he bestow so much as another thought upon her? He squared his slender shoulders, and turned with resolution to his book.

A minute later the impossibility of the situation had mastered every fiber of his brain. He put down the volume, feeling

himself to be a fool for doing so, yet suffering himself with an unheard-of gladness.

"If I anger you, I shall be much pained," he said, with a set face turned not quite toward her, and a voice that he kept from breaking by constant effort, "but I am going to England for the first time, and there are some things that I am very anxious to ask about."

She seemed to reflect a little before she lifted her head. Now again he was privileged to look squarely into her face, and he added swiftly to his store a new impression of her. The ruling characteristic of the countenance was a certain calm and serious reasonableness. The forehead was broad and comely; the glance of the eyes was at once alert and steady. The other features were content to support this controlling upper part of the face; they made a graceful and fitting frame for the mind which revealed itself in the eyes and brow—and sought to do no more. Studying her afresh in this moment of her silence, he recalled the face of a young Piedmontese bishop who had come once to his school. It had the same episcopal serenity, the same wistful pride in youth's conquest of the things immortal, the same suggestion of intellectuality in its clear pallor.

"I should dislike to seem rude," she said, slowly. "What is it that you want to ask?"

What was it indeed? He searched confusedly about in his mind for some one question entitled to precedence among the thousand to which answers would come in good time. He found nothing better than a query as to the connection between New Haven and Brighton.

"In this little book," he explained, "there is a time for New Haven and for London, but I cannot find a mention of Brighton, yet I am expected there this evening, or perhaps, early to-morrow morning."

"I am sure I cannot tell you," she answered. "However, the places are not far apart. I should say there would certainly be trains."

She lifted the book again as she spoke, and adjusted her shoulders to the cushions. He made haste to prevent the interview from lapsing.

"I have never seen England," he urged dolefully, "and yet I am all English in my blood—and in my feelings, too."

A flicker of ironical perception played for an instant in her eye and at the corner of her lip. "I have heard that a certain class of Americans adopt that pose," she remarked. "I dare say it is all right."

He did not grasp her meaning all at once, though the willingness to give umbrage conveyed in her tone was clear enough. He looked doubtfully at her, before he spoke again. "Oh," he began, with hesitation—"yes, I see—you thought I was American. I am not in the least—I am all English. And it affects me very much—this thought that in a few hours now I am to see the real England. I am so excited about it, in fact," he added with a deprecatory little laugh, "that I couldn't bear it not to talk."

She nodded comprehendingly. "I thought that your accent must be American—since it certainly isn't English."

"Oh, I have too facile an ear," he answered readily, as if the subject were by no means new to him. "I pick up every accent that I hear. I have been much with English people, but even more with Americans and Australians. I always talk like the last family I have been in—until I enter another. I am by profession a private tutor—principally in languages—and so I know my failings in this matter very well."

She smiled at some passing retrospect. "You must have had an especially complete sense of my shortcomings as a linguist, too. I have often wondered what effect my French would produce upon an actual pro-

fessor, but I should never have had the courage to experiment, if I had known."

He waved his hand—a pale hand with veined, thin, nervous fingers, which she looked at in its foreign gesture. "Too much importance is attached to languages," he declared. "It is the cheapest and most trivial of acquirements, if it stands alone, or if it is not put to high uses. Parents have so often angered me over this: they do not care what is in their children's minds and hearts, but only for the polish and form of what is on their tongues. I have a different feeling about education."

She nodded again, and laid the book aside. "You are coming to a country where everything will shock you, then," she said. "I would rather do scullery work, or break stones by the roadside, than be a schoolteacher in England."

"Oh, it's the same everywhere," he urged. "I would not think that the English were worse than the others. They are different, that is all. Besides, I do not think I shall be a teacher in England. Of course, I speak in the dark; for a few hours yet everything is uncertain. But as the old American senator at Monte Carlo used to say, 'I feel it in my bones' that I will not have to teach any more."

The expression of her face seemed somehow not to invite autobiography at the moment. "The prospect of not having to work any more for one's living," she mused at him—"how curiously fascinating it always is! We know perfectly well that it is good for us to work, and that we should be woefully unhappy if we did not work, and yet we are forever charming our imagination with a vision of complete idleness."

"I would not be idle!" the young man broke forth, enthusiastically. He leaned forward in his seat, and spoke with eager hands as well as words against the noise that filled the swaying carriage. "I have that same feeling—the longing to escape from the dull and foolish tasks I have to do—but I never say to myself that I would be idle. There are such a host of things to do in the world that are worth doing! But the men who have the time and the money, who are in the position to do these things—how is it, I ask myself, that they never think of doing them? It is the greatest of marvels to me. Then sometimes I wonder, if the chance and the power came to me, whether I also would sit down, and fold my hands, and do nothing. It is hard to say; who can be sure what is in him till he has been tested? Yet I like to think that I would

prove the exception. It is only natural," he concluded, smilingly, "that one should try to think as well as possible of oneself."

The young lady surveyed his nervous, mobile face with thoughtful impassivity. "You seem to think, one way or another, a good deal about yourself," she remarked.

He bowed to her, with a certain exaggeration in his show of quite sincere humility which, she said to herself, had not been learned from his English-speaking connections.

"What you say is very true," he admitted with candor. "It is my fault—my failing. I know it only too well."

"*My* fault is bad manners," she replied, disarmed by his self-abasement. "I had no business to say it at all."

"Oh, no," he urged. "It is delightful to me that you did say it. I could not begin to tell you how good your words sounded in my ears. Honest and wise criticism is what I have not heard before in years. You do not get it in the South; there is flattery for you, and sneering, and praise as much too high as blame is too cruel—but no candid, quiet judgments. Oh, I loved to hear you say that! It was like my brother—my older brother Salvator. He is in America now.

He is the only one who always said the truth to me. And I am glad, too, because—because it makes you seem like a friend to me, and I have been so agitated this whole week, so anxious and upset, and all without a soul to talk to, or advise with—and the pressure on me has been so great—"

He let the wandering sentence lose itself in the clamor of the train, and put the rest of his meaning into the glance with which he clung to hers. The appeal for sympathetic kindliness of treatment glowed in his eyes and shone upon his eager face.

She took time for her answer, and when she spoke it was hardly in direct reply. "Your business in England," she said, as unconcernedly as might be—"it is that, I take it, which causes so much anxiety. Fortunately it is soon to be settled—to-morrow, I think you said."

"I wish I might tell you about it," he responded with frank fervency. "I wish it—you cannot imagine how much!"

The look with which she received his words recalled to him her earlier manner. "I'm afraid—" she began, in a measured voice, and then stopped. Intuition helped him to read in her face the coming of a softer mood. Finally she smiled a little. "Really, this is all very quaint," she said, and the

smile crept into her voice. "But the train is slowing down—there is no time now."

They were indeed moving through the street of a town, at a pace which had been insensibly lowered while they talked. The irregular outlines of docks and boat-slips, overhanging greenish water, revealed themselves between dingy houses covered with signs and posters. At the barriers crossing the streets were clustered groups of philosophic observers, headed by the inevitable young soldier with his hands in the pockets of his red trousers, and flanked by those brown old women in white caps who seem always to be unoccupied, yet mysteriously do everything that is done.

"This is Dieppe, then?" he asked, with a collecting hand put out for his wraps.

The train had halted, and doors were being opened for tickets.

"We sit still, here, and go on to the wharf," she explained.

"And then to the boat!" he cried. "How long is it?—the voyage on the boat, I mean. Three hours and over! Excellent!"

She laughed outright as she rose, and got together her books and papers.

"I thought you were a Frenchman when I first saw you," she confided to him over her shoulder. "But no Frenchman at Dieppe

ever yet shouted 'Excellent!' with his face turned toward the New Haven steamers."

The mirth in her tone was so welcome to him that he laughed in turn, without any clear idea of her words. He gathered her handbag up along with his own, and when she demurred he offered her gay defiance.

"It is the terrible boldness of a timid person," he prattled, as he helped her down the steps, "but you must perceive that in the face of it you are quite helpless. Since I was born, I have never really had my own way before. But now I begin to believe in my star. After all, one is not an Englishman for nothing."

"Oh, it is comparatively easy to be an Englishman in Dieppe," she made answer.

CHAPTER II

The sky was dappled azure overhead, the water calm and fresh-hued below. When the ship's company had disposed itself, and the vessel was making way outside, there were numerous long gaps of unpeopled space on the windy side, and to one of these the young couple tacitly bent their steps. They leaned against the rail, standing close together, with their faces lifted to the strong sweet breeze.

Viewed thus side by side, it could be seen that of the two the young man was just perceptibly the taller, but his extreme fragility excused his companion's conception of him as a small man. On his head he had pulled tight for the voyage a little turban of a cap, which accentuated the foreign note of his features and expression. He was dark of skin and hair, with deep-brown eyes both larger and softer than is common with his sex, even in the South. The face, high and regular in shape, had in repose the careworn effect of maturer years than the boyish figure indicated. In the animation of discussion

this face took on, for the most part, the rather somber brilliancy of a strenuous earnestness. Now, as it confronted the stiff Channel wind, it was illumined by the unaccustomed light of a frivolous mood. The ends of his slight mustache were lifted in a continuous smile.

"It is my gayest day for many, many years," he told her, after a little pause in the talk. They had become great friends in this last half-hour. In the reaction from the questionable restraint of the coupé to the broad, sunlit freedom of the steamer's deck, the girl had revealed in generous measure a side of her temperament for which he had been unprepared. She had a humorous talent, and, once she had gained a clew to his perceptive capacities in this direction, it had pleased her to make him laugh by droll accounts of her experiences and observations in Paris. She had been there for a fortnight's holiday, quite by herself, she told him, and there was something in her tone which rendered it impossible for him to ask himself if this was at all unusual among English young ladies. His knowledge of Paris was also that of a stranger, and he followed her whimsical narrative of blunders and odd mistakes with a zest heightened by a recollection of his own.

"When have I laughed so much before?" he cried now. A long sigh, as of surprised relief, followed his words. "Well—I had looked forward to coming in a different spirit to England. With some hopes and a good courage—yes. But with a merry heart—how could I have foretold that? It was my good angel who put that coupé ticket into my head, and so brought me to you. Ah, how angry you were! I see you now, pulling at that door."

"Ah, well," she said in extenuation, "how could I know? I never dreamed that the whole coupé was not mine—and when I saw that odious guard opening the door, to force in some wretched little Continental creature—I mean, that was my momentary thought—and naturally I—"

An involuntary sidelong glance of his eyes upward toward the crown of her hat, passed mute comment on her unfinished remark. She bit her lip in self-reproof at sight of the dusky flush on his cheek.

"It is the only un-English thing about me," he said, with a pathetically proud attempt at a smile. "My father was a tall, big man, and so is my brother Salvator."

A new consciousness of the susceptibility of this young man to slights and wounds spread in the girl's mind. It was so cruelly

easy to prick his thin skin! But it was correspondingly easy to soothe and charm him—and that was the better part. His character and temperament mapped themselves out before her mind's eye. She read him as at once innocent and complicated. He could be full of confidence in a stranger, like herself, but his doubts about his own values were distressing. The uncased antennæ of his self-consciousness were extended in all directions, as if to solicit injury. She had caught in his brown eyes the suggestion of an analogy to a friendless spaniel—the capacity for infinite gratitude united with conviction that only kicks were to be expected. It was more helpful to liken him to a woman. In the gentle and timid soul of a convent-bred maiden he nourished the stormy ambitions of a leader of men. It was a nun who boldly dreamed of commanding on the field of battle.

"I had a feeling," she said to him, so softly that the tone was almost tender, "that you must be like your mother."

She rightly judged him to be her elder, but for the moment her mood was absorbingly maternal. "Let us sit down here," she added, moving toward the bench facing the rail. "You were going to tell me—about her, was it?"

He spread his rugs over their knees as they sat together in the fresh wind.

"No, it was not so much of her," he said. "I have much to think about her—not much to put into words. She died five years ago—nearly six now—and I was so much at school that I saw very little of her in the latter years. Salvator was with her always, though, to the end, although he was not her own son. We are half-brothers, but no one could have been fonder than he was of my mother, or a better son to her. After she died, he still kept me in school, and this was curious too, because he hated all my teachers bitterly. Salvator is fierce against the church, yet he kept me where I had been put years before, with the Christian Brothers at the Bon Rencontre, in Toulon. When at last I left them, Salvator took me with him for a period—he is an expert and a dealer in gems—and then I became a private tutor. Four years or so of that—and now I am here." He added, as upon an afterthought: "You must not think that I failed to love my mother. She was sweet and good, and very tender to me, and I used to weep a great deal after I left her, but it was not my fortune to be so much with her as Salvator was. I think of her, but there is not much to say."

The repetition of this formula suggested no comment to his companion, and he went on.

"The real memory of my childhood is my father, although I saw him only once. Salvator says I saw him oftener, but if so all the recollections jumble themselves together in my mind, to make a single impression. I was five years old; it was in the early summer, in 1875. My father had been fighting against the Prussians when I was born. By the time I was old enough to know people, he was away in Spain with Don Carlos. He died there, of wounds and fever, at Seo de Urgel, in August of that same year, 1875. But first he came to see us—it would have been in June, I think—and we were living at Cannes. He had some secret Carlist business, Salvator says. I knew nothing of that. I know only that I saw him, and understood very well who he was, and fixed him in my mind so that I should never, never forget him. How strange a thing it is about children! I have only the dimmest general idea of how my mother looked when I was that age; I cannot remember her at all in the odd clothes which her pictures show she wore then, though I saw them constantly. Yet my father comes once and I carry his image till Judgment Day."

"Poor mothers!" sighed the girl, under her breath. "No, it was nothing. Go on."

"I knew that he was a soldier, and that wherever there were wars he went to have his share of fighting. I suppose it was this which gripped my imagination, even as a baby. I could read when I was five, and Salvator had told me about our father's battles. He had been in the Mutiny in India, and he was in Sicily against Garibaldi, and he was with the Austrians four years before I was born, and in the French Foreign Legion afterward. I think I knew all this when I saw him—and if I did not, then I feel that I could have learned it from just looking at him. He was like a statue of War. Ah, how I remember him—the tall, strong, straight, dark, hardfaced, silent man!"

"And you loved *him!*" commented his companion, with significance.

He shook his head smilingly. The analysis in retrospect of his own childish emotions had a pleasant interest for him. "No; there was no question of love, at all. For example, he liked Salvator—who was then a big boy of fifteen—and he took him off to Spain with him when he left. I cannot remember that he so much as put his hand on my head, or paid the slightest attention to me. He looked at me in a grave way if I put

myself in front of his eyes, just as he looked at other things, but he would not turn his eyes to follow me if I moved aside. Do you know that to my fancy that was superb? I was not in the least jealous of Salvator. I only said to myself that when I was his age, I also would march to fight in my father's battles. And I was proud that he did not bend to me, or put himself out to please me, this huge, cold-eyed, lion-like father of mine. If he had ever kissed me I should have been ashamed—for us both. But nothing was farther from his thoughts. He went away, and at the door he spoke for the first time in my hearing of me. He twisted his thumb toward me, where I stood in the shelter of my mother's skirts. Mind, he's an Englishman! he said—and turned on his heel. I have the words in my ears still. 'Mind, he's an Englishman!'"

"There *is* England!" she cried.

They stood up, and his eager eye, following the guidance of her finger, found the faint, broken, thin line of white on the distant water's edge. Above it, as if they were a part of it, hung in a figured curtain soft clouds which were taking on a rosy tint from the declining sun. He gazed at the remote prospect in silence, but with a quickened breath.

"It is the first time that *I* have seen it like this—coming toward it, I mean, from somewhere else," she remarked at last. "I had never been outside England before."

He did not seem to hear her. With another lingering, clinging gaze at the white speck, he shook himself a little, and turned. "And now I want to tell you about this new, wonderful thing—about why I am this minute within sight of England. You will say it is very strange."

They moved to their bench again, and he spread the wraps once more, but this time they did not sit quite so close together. It was as if the mere sight of that pale, respectable slip of land on the horizon had in some subtle way affected their relation to each other.

"A week ago," he began afresh, "at Nice, a messenger from the Crédit Lyonnais brought me a note saying they wished to see me at the bank. They had, it seems, searched for me in several towns along the Riviera, because I had been moving about. It was demanded that I should prove my identity by witnesses, and when that was done I was given a sum of money, and a sealed letter addressed to me, bearing simply my name, Mr. Christian Tower—nothing more. I hurried outside and read its con-

tents. I was requested to get together all my papers—"

He stopped short, arrested by a sharp, half-stifled exclamation from her lips. She had continued looking at him after his mention of his name—at first absent-mindedly, as if something in his talk had sent her thoughts unconsciously astray; then with lifted head, and brows bent together in evident concentration upon some new phase of what he had been saying. Now she interrupted him with visible excitement.

"You say Christian Tower!" She pushed the words at him hurriedly. "What was your father's name?"

"He was always known as Captain Tower, but I have read it in my papers—his first name was Ambrose."

She had risen to her feet, in evident agitation, and now strode across to the rail. As he essayed to follow her, she turned, and forced the shadow of a smile into her lips; her eyes remained frightened. "It is all right," she said with a gasping attempt at reassurance. "I was queer for just an instant; it's all right. Go on, please. You were to get together your papers—"

"And bring them to Brighton," he said, much disconcerted. "That is all. But won't you sit down?"

"I think I would rather stand," she answered. Her composure was returning, and with it the power to view altogether, and in their proper relation to one another, the several elements of the situation his words had revealed to her. Upon examination, it was curiosity that she felt rather than personal concern—an astonished and most exigent curiosity. But even before this, it grew apparent to her as she thought, came her honorable duty to this young man who had confided in her.

"I think I ought to tell you," she began, beckoning him nearer where she stood; "yes, you should be told that in all human probability I know the story. It is impossible that I should be mistaken—two such names never got together by accident. And I can assure you that the whole thing is even more extraordinary and astounding than you can possibly imagine. There are people in England who will curl up like leaves thrown on the fire when they see you. But for the moment"—she paused, with a perplexed face and hesitating voice—"go on; tell me a little more. It isn't clear to me—how much you know. Don't be afraid; I will be entirely frank with you, when you have finished."

He patted the rail nervously with his hand,

and stared at her in pained bewilderment and impatience. "How much do I know?" he faltered vaguely. "Very little; almost nothing. There was no explanation in the letter. The bankers said nothing, save that they were to give me a thousand francs. But one does not get a thousand francs merely because the wind has changed. There must be a reason for it; and what reason is possible except that there is some inheritance for me? So I argued it out—to myself. I have thought of nothing else, awake or asleep, for the whole week."

He halted, with anxious appeal in his eyes, and his hands outspread to beseech enlightenment from her. She nodded to show that she understood. "In a minute or two, when I have got it into shape in my mind," she said soothingly. "But meantime go on. I want you to talk. What have you done during the week?"

Christian threw his hands outward. "Done?" he asked plaintively. "Murdered time some way or the other. I was free to move an hour after I had read the letter. The money was more than I had ever had before. It was intolerable to me—the thought of not being in motion. In the 'Indicateur' I got the times of trains, and I formed my plan. Avignon I had never seen, and then Le

Puy—there was a wonderful description of it in a magazine I had read—and then to Paris, and next to Rouen. It was at Rouen that I slept last night. It was my first night's good sleep—I had tired myself out so completely. Always walking with the map in my mind, going from one church to another, talking to the Suisse, bending back my head to examine capitals and arches, forcing myself to take an interest in what I saw every little minute—so I have come somehow through the week. But now here is rich England within plain sight, and here are you, my new friend—and all my life I have been so poor and without friends!"

He tightened his hand upon the rail, and abruptly turned his face away. She saw the shine of tears in his eyes.

"Come and sit down again," she said, with a sisterly hand on his arm. "I know how to tell it to you now."

"But you truly know nothing about the Towers—or Torrs—your father's family?" she continued, when they were once again seated. "It sounds incredible! I can hardly realize how you could have lived all these years and not—but how old are you?"

"Twenty-six."

"—And not got some inkling of who—of who your father was?"

"My mother never told me. Perhaps she did not know altogether, herself. I cannot say as to that. And if Salvator knew—that I cannot tell, either. He is a curious man, my brother Salvator. He talks so you would think you saw him inside out—but he keeps many things to himself none the less."

"Yes—that brother of yours," she said abstractedly. "I have been thinking about him. But it can't be that he has any importance in the game, else the Jews would have sent for him instead of you. They waste no time,—they make no errors."

"The Jews!" he murmured at her, with no comprehension in his eyes.

She smiled. "I have been arranging it in my mind. The thing was like a black fog to me when you first spoke. I had to search about for a light before I could make a start. But when I stumbled across the thought, 'It is the Jews' work,' then it was not very hard to make out the rest. I could almost tell you who it is that is to meet you at Brighton. It is Mr. Soman. Is it not?"

He assented with an impulsive movement of head and hands The gaze that he fixed upon her sparkled with excitement.

"He is Lord Julius' man of business," she explained to his further mystification. "No doubt he has had one of those green eyes of

his on you ever since you were a fortnight old. It frightens one to think of it—the merciless and unerring precision of their system. Is there anything they *don't* know?"

"I am afraid of Jews myself," he faltered, striving to connect himself with what he dimly perceived of her mood. "But what have they against me? What can they do to me? I owe nothing; they can't make me responsible for what other people, strangers to me, have done, can they? And why should they give me a thousand francs? It is I," he finished hopelessly, "I who am in the black fog. Tell me, I beg you, what is it that they want with me?"

She put a reassuring hand upon his arm, and the steady, genial light in her calm eyes brought him instantaneous solace. "You have not the slightest cause for fear," she told him, gently. "Quite the contrary. They are not going to hurt you. So far from it, they have taken you up; they will wrap you in cotton-wool and nurse you as if you were the Koh-i-noor diamond. You may rest easy, my dear sir; you may close your eyes, and fold your hands, and lean back against Israel as heavily as you like. It is all right so far as you are concerned. But the others"—she paused, and looked seaward with lifted brows and a mouth

twisted to express sardonic comment upon some amazing new outlook—"eye-ee! the others!"

"Still you do not tell me!" For the first time she caught in his voice the hint of a virile, and even an imperious note. Behind the half-petulant entreaty of the tired boy, there was a man's spirit of dictation. She deferred to it unconsciously.

"The Lord Julius that I spoke of is—let me see—he is your great-uncle—your grandfather's younger brother."

"But if *he* is a Jew—" began Christian, in an awed whisper.

"No—no; he is nothing of the sort. That is to say, he is not Jewish in blood. But he married a great heiress of the race—whole millions sterling came to him from the huge fortune of the Aronsons in Holland—and he likes Jewish people—of the right sort. He is an old man now, and his son, Emanuel, has immense influence over him. You should see them sitting together like two love-birds on a perch. They idolize each other, and they both worship Emanuel's wife. If they weren't the two best men in the world, and if she weren't the most remarkable woman anywhere, they would utterly spoil her."

"He—this lord—is my great-uncle,"

Christian recalled her to his subject. "He and his son are good men."

"They are the ones I referred to as the Jews. That is how they are spoken of in the family—to distinguish them from the senior branch—the sons and grandsons of your grandfather. Fix that distinction in you mind. There is the elder group, who have titles and miles of mortgaged estates, no money to speak of and still less brains—"

"That is the group that I belong to?" He offered the interruption with a little twinkle in his eyes. It was patent that his self-possession had returned. Even this limited and tentative measure of identification with the most desirable and deep-rooted realities in that wonderful island that he could see coming nearer to meet him, had sufficed to quell the restless flutter of his nerves.

She nodded with a responsive gleam of sportiveness on her face. "Yes, your place in it is a very curious one. But first get this clear in your mind—that the younger group, whom they speak of as the Jews, have money beyond counting, and have morals and intelligence moreover. Between these two groups no love is lost. In fact, they hate each other. The difference is the Christians go about cursing the Jews, whereas the Jews

wisely shrug their shoulders and say nothing. No one suspected that they would *do* anything, either—but—oh, this is going to be an awful business!"

He held himself down to a fine semblance of dignified calm. "Tell me more," he bade her, with an effect of temperate curiosity.

"Now comes tragedy," she went on, and the hint of sprightliness disappeared from her face and tone. "It is really one of the most terrible stories that could be told. There is a very aged man—he must be nearly ninety—lying at death's door in his great seat in Shropshire. He is at death's door, I said, but he has the strength and will of a giant, and though he is half paralyzed, half blind, half everything, still he has his weight against the door, and no one knows how long he can hold it closed. It is your grandfather that I am speaking of. His name also is Christian."

The young man nodded gravely. "My father would have fought death that way too, if they had not shot him to pieces, and heaped fever on top of that," he commented.

The girl bit her lip and flushed awkwardly for an instant. "Let me go on," she said then, and hurried forward. "This old man had three sons—not counting the priest,

Lord David, who doesn't come into the thing. The first of these sons, also Christian, had three sons, and he and they were all alive six months ago. They are all dead now, two drowned in their yacht, one lost in the 'Castle Drummond,' one killed in Matabeleland. Lord David, the priest, the next brother, died last year—childless of course. There remained in England two sons of another brother who died some years ago, Lord Edward, and this horrible mowing down of human lives left them apparently nearest to the very aged man, your grandfather. Do you follow all that?"

"I think I do," said Christian. "If I don't I will pick it up afterward. In mercy's name, do not stop!"

"The Jews, saying nothing, had lost sight of nothing. There was still another brother who had lived abroad for many years, who died abroad twenty years ago. You are getting to the climax now. The Jews must have kept an eye on this wandering cousin of theirs; it is evident they knew he left a son capable of inheriting, and that they did not let this son escape from view. Because Lord Ambrose Torr was older than Lord Edward, his brother, it happens now that the son of that Ambrose—"

The young man abruptly rose, and moved

along to the rail. He had signified by a rapid backward gesture of the hand his momentary craving for solitude; he stretched this hand now slowly, as if unconsciously, toward the sunset glow on sky and sea, in the heart of which lay imbedded a thick line of cream-colored cliffs, escalloped under a close covering of soft olive-hued verdure. The profile of his uplifted face, as he gazed thus before him into the light, seemed to the eyes of the girl transfigured.

He stood thus, rapt and motionless, for minutes, until her mind had time to formulate the suspicion that this was all intolerable play-acting, and to dismiss it again as unworthy. Then he returned all at once to her side, apparently with a shamefaced kind of perception of her thoughts. He was flushed and uneasy, and shuffled his hands in and out of the pockets of his great-coat. He did not seat himself, but stood looking down at her.

"What is my grandfather?" he asked, with a husky, difficult voice.

"The Duke of Glastonbury."

"I do not understand," he began, hesitatingly; "it is not clear to me about my father. Why should he—"

She rose in turn, with swift decision, as if she had been alertly watching for the ques-

tion. "That is what you must not ask me," she said, hurriedly. "I think I will move about a little. The wind is colder here. I am getting chilled."

They strolled about together, conducting a fitful conversation, but as often gazing in silence at the bulk of the headlands they were approaching, gray and massive now in the evening light. She answered freely enough the queries he put, but between these he lapsed into an abstraction which she respected. More than once he spoke of the extraordinary confusion into which her story had thrown his thoughts, and she philosophically replied that she could well understand it.

An hour later they had passed the fatuous inspection of the customs people, and confronted the imminence of leave-taking. Constraint enveloped them as in a mantle.

It occurred suddenly to him to say: "How strange! You possess the most extraordinary knowledge of me and my—my people, and yet the thought just comes to me—I have not so much as asked your name."

She smiled at him with a new light in her eyes, half kind, half ironically roguish. "If I may confess it, there have been times today when I was annoyed with you for being so persistently and indefatigably interested

in yourself—for never dreaming of wondering, speculating, inquiring something about me. But that was very weak of me—I see it now—and very wise of you, because—what does it matter about a nobody like me?—but next week the whole world will be bearing witness that you are the most interesting young man in England."

He gave a swift glance down the train toward the guards noisily shutting the doors. "No, it is too bad," he said, nervously. "You will always be my first friend in England—my very deeply prized friend everywhere. I know you only to-day—but that day is more to me than all the rest of my life—and it is full of you. They are closing the doors—but you will tell me? The notion of not seeing you again is ridiculous. You are in London—yes?—then how do you think I could come to London without first of all, before everything else, wanting to call upon you?"

"Oh, I daresay we shall meet again," she answered, as perforce he stepped into the compartment. Her smile had a puzzling quality in it—something compounded, it seemed to him, of both fear and fun. "In a remote kind of way I am mixed up with the story myself."

There was no time for any hope of further

explanation. He put his head out of the window, and shook hands again. "Remember!" he called out fervently. "You are my first friend in England. Whenever—whatever I can do—"

"Even to the half of your kingdom!" she laughed at him, as the movement of the carriage drew him past her.

The tone of these last words, which he bore away with him, had been gay—almost jovial. But the girl, when she had watched him pass out of sight, turned and walked slowly off in the direction of her own train with a white and troubled face.

CHAPTER III

Many builders in their day have put a hand to the making of Caermere Hall. Though there were wide differences of race and language among them and though the long chain of time which binds them together has generations and even centuries for its links, they seem to have had thus much in common: they were all at feud with the sunlight.

On the very pick of summer days, when the densest thickets of Clune Forest are alive to the core with moving green reflections of the outer radiance, and hints of the glory up above pierce their way to the bottom of the narrowest ravine through which the black Devor churns and frets, somehow Caermere remains wrapped in its ancient shadows.

The first men, in some forgotten time, laid its foundations with no thought save of the pass at the foot to be defended. Later artificers reared thick walls upon these foundations, pushed out towered curtains, sank wells, lifted the keep, cut slits of corner windows or crowned the fabric with new

turrets for watchmen, each after the need or fashion of his age, but all with minds single to the idea of blocking the path that Caermere overhung. In due time came the breath of the king's peace, blowing equably over the vexed marches, albeit loaded with the scent of gunpowder, and my lords slowly put aside their iron harness for silken jackets, and unslung the herses in their gateways. Men of skill set now about the task of expanding the turfed spaces within the inclosure, of spreading terraces and forming gardens, of turning stone chambers into dames' apartments, and sullen guard-rooms into banquet-halls. Their grandsons, in turn, pulled down even more than they erected; where the mightiest walls had shouldered their huge bulk, these men of Elizabeth and James left thin façades of brickwork, and beams of oak set in a trivial plaster casing. The old barbican was not broad enough to span their new roadway, stretching to the valley below over the track of the former military path, and they blew it up; the pleasure-ground, which they extended by moving far backward the wall of the tilting yard, was bare of aspect to their eye, and they planted it with yews and, later, with cedars from the Lebanon.

Through all these changes, Caermere

remained upon its three sides shadowed by great hills, and the thought of making wide windows in the walls on the open fourth side came to no one. When at last, in the earlier Georgian time, the venerable piles of bastioned masonry here were replaced by a feebly polite front of lath and stucco, windows were indeed cut to the very floor, in the French style, but meanwhile the trees had grown into a high screen against the sky, and it was not in the Torr blood to level timber.

When a house and family have lived together for a thousand years, it is but reasonable that they should have come to an understanding with each other. Was Caermere dark because the mood of the Torrs, its makers and masters, had from the dawn of things been saturnine? Or did the Torrs owe their historic gloom and dourness of temperament to the influence of this somber cradle of their race? There is record of the query having been put, in a spirit of banter, by a gentleman who rode over Clune bridge in the train of King John. Of convincing answer there is none to this latest day. The Torrs are a dark folk, and Caermere is a dark house. They belong to one another and that is all.

Thus, on the first morning of October, a

gray and overcast morning even on the hill-tops, and though it was past the half-hour towards nine, there was barely light enough to see one's way about by in the big breakfast-room.

A tall young man in rough, light-brown clothes stood at one of the windows, drumming idly on the glass and staring at the black cedars beyond the lawn. At intervals he whistled under his breath, in a sulky fashion, some primitive snatches of an unknown tune. Once or twice he yawned, and then struck a vicious ring from the panes with his hard nails, in protesting comment upon his boredom.

About the large fireplace behind him were dishes huddled for heat, and their metallic gleam in the flicker of the flames was repeated farther away in the points of red on the plate and glass of the long breakfast table spread in the center of the room. From time to time a white-faced youngster in livery entered the room, performed some mysterious service at the hearth or the table in the dim twilight and went out again.

The man at the window paid no heed to the goings and comings of the servant, but when the door opened presently and another tweed-clad figure entered, his ear told him

the difference on the instant, and he half turned his head.

"In God's name, what are you all doing?" he growled angrily. "I said eight—you heard me!—sharp eight!"

"What *does* it matter?" protested the newcomer, stooping at the fire-place to lift the covers from the dishes in a languid inspection of their contents. He yawned as he spoke. "If you won't let fellows go to bed till four, how the devil do you expect them to be down at eight?"

"Oh, is that you, Pirie?" said the man at the window. "I thought it was my brother."

The other stood for a moment, with his back to the fire. Then he lounged to the window, stretching his arms as he moved. He also was tall, but with a scattering of gray in his hair.

"Beastly black morning," he commented in drowsy tones, after a prolonged observation of the prospect. "Might as well stopped in bed."

"Well, go back then!" snapped the other. "I didn't make the rotten weather, did I?"

This was wanton ill-temper. The elder man also began drumming with his nails on the window. "Turn it up, Eddy," he remonstrated, smoothly enough, but with a latent snarl in his tone. "I don't like it."

The younger man moved his head, as if he would have looked his companion in the face. Then he stared away again, out of the window.

"Beaters been waitin' half an hour already," he grumbled, sulkily. "What's the good of makin' a time if you don't keep it?"

"I didn't make any time," responded Major Pirie with curtness. Upon reflection, he added: "What does it matter about the beaters?"

There seemed no answer to this, and for several minutes nothing was said. Finally the younger man thought of something. "I say," he began, and after an instant's pause went on: "It'd suit me better not to be called 'Eddy' among the men, d'ye see? That fellow Burlington began it last night—he got it from you—and I don't like it. When we're alone, of course, that's different."

Major Pirie laughed—a dry, brief, harsh laugh—and swung around on his heels. "Your man didn't get those sausages I asked for, after all," he remarked, going back to the dishes at the fender.

"Probably couldn't," said Mr. Edward, "or else," he added, "wouldn't. I never saw such a houseful of brutes and duffers.

I'm keen to shunt the lot of 'em, and they know it, the beggars. You'd think they'd try to suck up to me, but they don't, they haven't got brains enough."

The major had brought a plate from the table, and was filling it from under the covers on the hearth. "Shall I ring for the tea?" he asked.

Mr. Edward moved across to the chimney corner and pulled the cord himself. "Do you know what that old ass, Barlow — the butler, you know—had the face to say to me yesterday? 'I'—God, you couldn't believe it! 'I 'ope, sir,' he says, 'you'll think better of shootin' on the First, for His Grace'll hear the guns in the covers, and it won't do His Grace no good.' Fancy the beggar's cheek!"

"Well, do you know, Torr," said Major Pirie, slowly, speaking with his mouth full but contriving to give a significantly nice emphasis to the name, "I was thinkin' much the same myself. For that matter, several of the fellows were mentionin' it. It doesn't look quite the thing, you know."

The entrance of the servant created an interval of silence, during which Mr. Edward in his turn rummaged among the dishes before the fire.

"It's Gus, is it?" he demanded, from where he knelt on one knee, plate in hand.

"He thought it would be funny to queer my game, eh?"

"Your brother hasn't said a word, so far's I know," replied the major, pouring his tea. "It was merely some of the fellows, talkin'."

"God Almighty!" cried Mr. Edward, springing to his feet. "Here's a precious outfit of pals for you! You come down here, so help me—"

"Don't say 'you'; say 'they,' if you've got to say anything," interposed the major, quietly.

"Well, they, then," the other went on, in loud heat. "They come down here, and take my mounts, by God; they drink my wine, they win my money, they drain me dry—and then they go behind my back and whisper to one another that I'm an outsider. And you too, Pirie," he continued, with defiance and deprecation mingled in his tone, "you admit yourself that you talked with them."

"My dear Torr," replied the major, "it's a mistake for you to turn out so early. You've tried to quarrel before breakfast every day I've been here. It's the worst morning temper I ever heard of in my life. You ought to have tea and eggs and things brought to you in your room, and not show

yourself for at least two hours afterward—you really ought. It isn't fair to your friends."

The door opened and still another tall man came in. He nodded to Pirie as he passed him, with a tolerant "Well, major," and went straight to the dishes by the fire.

"Pirie's got it into his head we oughtn't to shoot to-day, Gus," said Mr. Edward.

The other rose with a dish in his hands.

"It *is* dark," he assented, glancing toward the window. "Afraid of pottin' a beater, major?"

"No—it's about the duke," explained Edward. "It seems some of the fellows funk the thing—they think he'll hear the guns—they want to go to church instead, or something of that sort."

Augustine Torr, M.P., looked at his brother inquiringly. The tie of blood between them was obvious enough. They were both slender as well as tall; their small round heads merging indistinguishably behind into flat, broad necks, seemed identical in contour; they had the same light coarse hair, the same florid skins, even the same little yellow mustaches. The differences were harder to seek. Edward, though he had borne Her Majesty's commission for some years, was not so well set up about the

shoulders as his younger and civilian brother. Augustine, on the other hand, despite his confident carriage of himself, produced the effect of being Edward's inferior in simple force of character. It was at once to his credit and his disparagement that he had the more amiable nature of the two.

"How do you mean—the duke?" he asked. "Is there a change?"

Edward put out his closed lips a little, and shook his head. Major Pirie sprinkled salt on his muffin while he explained.

"All there is of it is this," he said. "There was just an idea that with the—with your grandfather—dyin' in the house—it might look a little better to give the first the go-by. Nobody'd have a word to say against shootin' to-morrow."

"Well, but what the hell"—Augustine groped his way with hesitancy—"I don't understand—we've been shootin' partridges for a month, and how are pheasants any different? And as for the duke—why, of course one's sorry and all that—but he's been dyin' since June, and the birds have some rights—or rather, I should say—what I mean is—"

"That's what I said," put in Edward, to cover the collapse of his brother's argument.

Major Pirie frowned a little. "Partridges are another matter," he said testily.

"Damned if I know what you're driving at," avowed Augustine. He paused with fork in air at his own words. "Drivin' at," he repeated painstakingly. "Drivin' at pheasants, eh? Not bad, you know. Pass the mustard, Pirie."

"God!" said the major, with gloom. "You know well enough what I mean. To work through fields miles off—that's one thing. To shoot the covers here under the duke's nose, with the beaters messin' about—that's quite another. However that's your affair, not mine."

"But don't you see," urged Augustine, "what difference does a day make? There'll be just as much racket to-morrow as to-day. It isn't reasonable, you know."

"It was merely what you might call a sentiment," said the major, in the half apologetic tone of a man admitting defeat. He looked the least sentimental of warriors as he went on with his breakfast—a long-faced, weather-beaten, dull-eyed man of the late forties.

Four other men who came in now at brief intervals, with few or no words of salutation to the company, and who lounged about helping themselves to what caught their

fancy in the breakfast, were equally removed from the suspicion of adding a sentimental element to the atmosphere. They made little talk of any kind, and no mention whatever of that absurd qualm about the First which had been reported to have germinated among them.

Edward had reached the stage of filling his pipe. Walking to the mantel for a light, it occurred to him to ring the bell first. "Her ladyship breakfastin' in her room?" he asked the youngster who answered the summons.

"Her ladyship's woman has just gone up with it, sir," he replied.

"*That's* all right," said Edward, and forthwith struck the match. "Send in Davis and Morton to me, and ask Barlow for those Brazilian cigars of mine—the small huntin' ones. What wheels were those I heard on the gravel? If it's the traps we shan't want them to-day. We're walkin' across."

"I will make inquiries, sir," said the domestic, and went out.

The room had brightened perceptibly, and Captain Edward was in a better temper. He moved over to the sideboard and filled a pocket-flask from one of the decanters in the old-fashioned case. As an afterthought, he also filled a small glass, and gulped its contents neat. "We're off in ten minutes

now," he called out to the men about the table, some of whom had already lit their pipes. "What do you fellows want to take with you? My tip is this rum."

"Hardly cold enough for rum, is it?" asked one, drifting languidly toward the sideboard. Most of the others had risen to their feet.

A slender, sad-faced, gentlemanly-looking old man in evening clothes had entered the room, and stood now at Captain Edward's elbow and touched it with his hand. "I—beg—your—pardon—sir," he said, in the conventional phrase.

Edward, listening to what a companion was saying, turned absent-mindedly to the butler. Then he happened to remember something. "Damn you, Barlow, you get duller every day!" he snapped. "You know perfectly well what cigars I take out of doors!"

"I—beg—your—pardon—sir," repeated the elderly person. He spoke in a confidential murmur. "I thought you would like to know, sir—Lord Julius has come."

The young man looked at him, silently revolving the intelligence, a puzzled frown between his pale brows. A furtive something in the butler's composed expression struck him. "What of it?" he demanded,

angrily. "What are you whispering for? He's old enough to take care of himself, isn't he?"

The butler thrust out his dry underlip a trifle. "I thought you would like to know, sir," he reiterated.

"Well, you're wrong. I don't like to know!" The man's tone—an indefinable, lurking suggestiveness in his face and eyes and voice—vexed Mr. Edward exceedingly. It annoyed him still more to note that his companions had tacitly turned their backs, and were affecting great preoccupation in something else.

He kept a wrathful eye on Barlow, as the latter bowed, turned, moved to the door and opened it. Of course, a man musn't slang servants, his irritated thought ran, but the covert impertinence in this old menial's manner was something no longer to be borne. The impulse to call the elderly fool back and send him packing on the instant, tingled hotly in the young man's blood. He even opened his lips to speak, but reflection checked his tongue. It would be bad form, for one thing; for another, perhaps he was not quite in the position to dismiss his grandfather's servants. He would speak to Welldon, the estate steward, instead—a sensible and civil man, by the way, who seemed to

know which side his bread was buttered on. At the merest hint from the heir, Welldon would give Barlow the sack, and that would teach the rest a lesson. But all this would keep until Lord Julius had gone. Being an aged duffer himself, he would probably side with Barlow—and there was no point in offending Lord Julius. Very much to the contrary, indeed.

Mr. Edward's meditations, unwontedly facile in their movements for him, had reached this point, when his mind reverted to the fact that he was still regarding the back of Barlow, who, instead of going out, stood holding the door open, his lean figure poised in ceremonious expectancy. Even as the surprised Edward continued looking, the butler made a staid obeisance.

A stalwart, erect, burly old gentleman came in, and halted just over the threshold to look about him. He had the carriage, dress and general aspect of a prosperous and opinionated farmer. The suggestion of acres and crops was peculiarly marked in the broad, low soft hat on his head, and in the great white beard which spread fan-wise over his ample breast. He had the face of one who had spent a life in commanding others, and had learned meanwhile to master himself—a frank, high-featured, ruddy face,

with a conspicuously prominent and well-curved nose, and steady, confident eyes. He folded his hands over his stick and, holding his head well back, glanced about the room at his ease. It was a glance from which the various eyes that it encountered somehow turned away.

"How-do, Eddy? How-do, Gus?" the newcomer said impassively to the two young men who, with palpable constraint, came up to greet him. He shook hands with each, but seemed more interested in viewing the company at large. His appearance had produced a visible effect of numbness upon the group of guests, but he seemed not to mind this.

"Quite a party!" he observed. His voice was full and robust, and not unamiable. "All military?"

Edward nodded. "All but Gus, here. Glad to introduce 'em, if you like," he murmured, with a kind of sullen deference.

"Presently, presently," said Lord Julius, with an effect of heartiness at which Edward lifted his head.

"Drive over from Clune this morning?" the young man asked. "Then you'll want breakfast. Ring the bell, Gus. We're just starting for the Mere copse. Glad to have you make an eighth gun, if you'll come to

us after you've eaten. You still shoot, don't you?"

"Oh, yes, I still shoot," said the other.

Edward had a sense of embarrassment at his great-uncle's immobility in the doorway. "Well, we'll get along to the gun-room now," he said to the others. Then to Lord Julius he remarked with an air of making conversation, "I always say to the fellows that I ask nothing better in this world than to be as fit as you are when I'm your age. Let's see, seventy-six, isn't it?"

The elder man nodded. "I'm sure that's a modest enough ambition," he observed. His steady gray eyes dallied with the young man's countenance for a moment. "I'm relieved to learn that you want nothing more than that."

Edward looked up swiftly, and braved an instant's piercing scrutiny of the other's face. Then he laughed, uneasily. "Oh, I want a few other things, too."

Lord Julius lowered his voice. "I would put among your wants a trifling matter of good taste, Eddy," he said, not unkindly.

Captain Edward flushed. "If I could see that it really made any difference between the First and the Second," he answered with dogged civility, "I wouldn't shoot until to-

morrow. If you're keen about it now, I'll—"

"Oh, damn your First and Second," broke in the old man, keeping his voice down below the hearing of the others, but letting impatience glow in his eyes; "you had no business bringing these men here at all. No—I see that you don't understand me. You needn't explain. It's entirely a question of feeling."

"I'm sorry you take that view of it, sir," said Edward, gloomily. "You know that I'm willing enough to meet your views—if only—if only because I'm going to need your help."

Lord Julius gave a snort of contemptuous laughter, and nodded to himself with lifted brows. "Really something in the way of consideration is due to such frankness as that," he said, with a pretense of reverie. "Send your friends out of the room, Eddy," he went on, more gently—"make what excuse you like—or take them out and come back to me—that's better. I did intend to have no secrets from them, but I've relented. And yes—by the way—instead of coming here—you'll find me in the small morning room I will breakfast there. You've filled this room with smoke."

"Would you—would you mind my bringing Gus?" Edward asked, doubtfully.

The other thought for an instant. "Oh, yes, Gus may come," he said, and with that left the room.

"Rum old beggar, isn't he?" said Augustine to the company, with the sense that something had to be said.

"Gad! he seemed to think he was in a synagogue!" laughed Captain Burlington. "Kept his hat on, you know," he explained in the next breath to the surprised and attentive faces about him.

"But he isn't a Jew," said one of the others with gravity. "He married one, but that doesn't make him one, you know."

"It was a joke! Can't you see a joke?" protested Burlington.

"Well, I don't think much of it," growled Edward, sourly. "Come along to the gun-room."

* * * * *

"What's up?" asked Mr. Augustine, in an anxious murmur, a few minutes later, as the two brothers walked along the wide central hallway toward the appointed place.

"Can't think for the life of me," replied Edward. "Unless Craven babbled about the baccarat when he got up to town. He's rather that sort, you know. He kicked about the stakes at the time."

"Yes—after he'd been hit," said Augus-

tine. "But if it's only that, you'll be an ass to let the old man rot you about it. Just stand up to him, and let him see you feel your position."

"That's all right," rejoined Edward, dubiously, "but what's the position without money? If anybody could have foreseen what was going to happen—damn it all, I could have married as much as I needed. But as it is, I've got Cora on my back, and the kid, and—my God! fancy doing the duke on four thou. a year net! Welldon tells me it can't be screwed a bit above that. Well, then, how can I afford to cheek Julius? When you come to that he isn't half a bad sort, you know. He stood my marriage awfully well. Gad, you know, we couldn't have lived if he hadn't drawn a check."

"Let us hope he'll draw another," said Augustine. "It's bad enough to be a pauper duke, but it's a balley sight worse to be his brother."

"What rot!" said Edward. "My kid's a girl, and you're free to marry."

They had come to the door of the morning room. It stood ajar, and Edward pushed it open. Before the fireplace was visible the expected bulk and vast beard of Lord Julius, but the eyes of the brothers intuitively wandered to the window beyond, against which

was outlined the figure of a much smaller man.

"Secretary," whispered the quicker-minded Augustine out of the corner of his mouth as they advanced. The thought brought them a tempered kind of comfort. The same instinct which had prompted Edward to crave his brother's support led them both to welcome the presence of a fourth party.

They looked again toward the stranger, and Lord Julius, as he caught their returning glance, smiled and nodded significantly. "Come here, Christian!" he said, and the brothers saw now that it was a slender young man with a dark, fine face and foreign-looking eyes who moved toward them.

Lord Julius put a hand on the young man's shoulder. "Christian," he said, and gave his full voice a new note of gravity, "these are your two cousins, Mr. Edward Torr, a captain in the Hussars until recently, and Mr. Augustine Torr, a member of Parliament. Your coming will make some difference in their affairs, but I know that you will be good to them."

The brothers had shaken hands with the new-comer automatically, while their minds were in the first stage of wonderment as to

what the words being spoken about him meant. Now that silence fell, they stared slowly at him, at their great-uncle, at each other.

"How—cousin?" Edward managed to ask. He spoke as if his tongue filled his mouth.

"The son of your uncle, Lord Ambrose Torr," the old man made quiet, carefully distinct answer.

Another period of silence ensued, until Christian turned abruptly. "It is very painful to me," he said hurriedly to the old man, and walked to the window.

"It is painful to everybody," said Lord Julius.

"Not so damned particularly painful to you, sir, I should say," put in Edward, looking his great-uncle in the face. The young man had slowly pulled himself together, and one could see the muscles of his neck being stiffened to keep his chin well in the air. His blue eyes had the effect of summoning all their resources of pride to gaze with dignity into the muzzle of a machine-gun.

Augustine was less secure in the control of his nerves. He stood a little behind his brother, and the elbow which he braced against him for support trembled. His eyes wandered about the room, and he moistened

his lips with his tongue several times before he contrived to whisper something into Edward's ear. The latter received the suggestion, whatever it was, with an impatient shake of the head.

"You scarcely do me justice," said Lord Julius, quietly, "but that's not worth mentioning at the moment. I must say you are taking it very well—much better than I expected."

Edward squared his shoulders still more. "I wouldn't say that we're takin' it at all," he replied, with studied deliberation. "You offer it, d'ye see—but it doesn't follow that we take it. You come and bring this young fellow—this young gentleman, and you tell me that he is Ambrose's son. What good is that to me? Maybe he is, maybe he isn't. Ambrose may have had twenty sons, for all I know. I should be sorry to be one of them—but they're not to blame for that. I don't mind being civil to them—if they come to me in the right spirit—" He stopped abruptly, and listened with a frown to more whispering from Augustine.

"You don't seem to understand, Eddy—" began Lord Julius.

"Oh, perfectly!" broke in the young man. "I had an uncle who had to leave England before I was born. His name couldn't even

be mentioned in the family—but I know all about him. God knows I've had him flung in my face often enough."

"Don't let us go into that," urged Lord Julius, softly, and with a sidelong nod toward the window. "It's needless cruelty to other people—and surely we can discuss this like gentlemen. You are really behaving splendidly, Eddy."

"God! he thought we were cads!" cried Edward, in husky indignation.

"No—no—no—no," murmured the older man, soothingly. "I only want you to grasp the thing as it is. You know me. You do not regard me as a foolish person who goes off half-cock. Well, I tell you that Christian here is the son of my nephew Ambrose, born in lawful wedlock, and that there is not a shadow of doubt about it. The proofs are all open to your inspection; there is not a flaw in them. And so I say to you, in all kindness—take it calmly and sensibly and like a gentleman. It is to your own interest to do so, as well. If you think, you will see that."

"That's what I've been telling him," said Augustine, strenuously, from behind his brother's shoulder.

A faint smile fluttered about the old man's eyelids. "It was the advice of a born states-

man," he said, dryly. "You are the political hope of the family."

The stiffening had melted from Edward's neck and shoulders. He turned irresolutely now, and looked at the floor. "Of course I admit nothing; I reserve all my rights, till my lawyers have satisfied themselves," he said in a worn, depressed mutter.

"Why, naturally," responded Lord Julius, with relieved cordiality. "And now please me—do it all handsomely to the end—come and shake hands again with Christian, both of you."

The brothers stood for a hesitating instant, then turned toward the window and began a movement of reluctant assent.

To the surprise of all three, Christian forestalled their approach by wrenching open one half of the tall window, and putting a foot over the sill to the lawn outside.

"If you will excuse me," he said, in his nervous, high voice, "I am taking a little walk."

CHAPTER IV

Upon the garden side of Caermere is a very large conservatory, built nearly fifty years ago, at the close of the life of the last duchess. The poor lady left no other mark of her meek existence upon the buildings, and it was thought at the time that she would never have ventured upon even this, had it not been that every one was mad for the moment about the wonderful palace of glass reared in London for the First Exhibition.

In area and height, and in the spacious pretensions of its dome, the structure still suggests irresistibly the period of its inception. It is as ambitious as it is self-conscious; its shining respectability remains superior to all the wiles of climbers and creeping vines. The older servants cherish traditions of "Her Grace's glass," as it used to be called. She had the work begun on her fortieth birthday, and precisely a year later it happened that she was wheeled in from the big morning room, and left at her own desire to recline in solitude under the palms beneath the dome, and that when they went

to her at last she was dead. The circumstance that Shakespeare is supposed also to have died on the anniversary of his birth, has somehow come to be an integral part of the story, as it is kept alive now in the humbler parts of the Caermere household, but the duchess had nothing else in common with the poet. The very face of her, in her maturer years, is but dimly remembered. The portrait in the library is of a young Lady Clarissa, with pale ringlets and a childishly sweet countenance, and clad in the formal quaintness of the last year of King George the Fourth. She became the duchess, but in turn the duchess seemed to become somebody else. That was the way with the brides brought home to Caermere. The pictures in the library show them all girlish, and innocently pretty, and for the most part fair-haired. Happily there is no painted record of what they were like when, still in middle life, they bade a last goodbye to the dark-skinned, big-shouldered sons they had borne, and perhaps made a little moan that no daughters were ever given to mothers at Caermere, and turned their sad faces to the wall.

The crystal house had memories of another and more recent mistress, the countess. She had come six years after the other went,

she had lived for twelve years—a silent, colorless, gently unhappy life—and then had faded away out of sight. It was this Lady Porlock who had caused the orchid houses to be built at the inner side of the conservatory, and it was in her time, too, that the gifted Cheltnam was fetched from her own father's house in Berkshire to be head gardener at Caermere. Her fame is indeed irrevocably linked with his, for the tea-rose of his breeding, bearing her maiden-name of the Hon. Florence Denson, is scarcely less well known than this hybrid sweet-briar the Countess of Porlock.

And now, in the third generation, still another lady had for some years enjoyed special property rights in this great glass apartment.

Lady Cressage came into the conservatory from the large morning room, with a large volume in her hand, and an irresolute look on her face. She glanced about at the several couches piled with cushions and furs, at an easy-chair beyond—and yawned slightly. Then she wandered over to a row of early chrysanthemums, and, putting the book under her arm, occupied herself with the destruction of a few tiny beginnings of buds in the lower foliage. In this she employed as pincers the delicately tinted

nails of a very shapely finger and thumb, and at the sign of some slight discoloration of these she stopped the work. From a glance at the nails, she went to a musing scrutiny of this whole right hand of hers, holding it up, and turning it from one composition of graceful curves to another. It had been called the most beautiful hand in England, but this morning its owner, upon a brief and rather listless inspection of its charms, yawned again. Finally she seated herself in the chair and, after a languid search for the place in her book, began to read

Half reclining thus, with the equable and shadowless light of the glass house about her, the young widow made a picture curiously different from any in the library within. All the dead and gone brides of the Torrs had been painted in bright attire; Lady Cressage wore a belted gown of black cloth, unrelieved save by a softened line of white at the throat and wrists. The others, without exception, had signified by elaborate hair-dressing not less than by dutifully vacuous facial expressions, their comprehension of the requirements of the place they had been called upon to fill; Lady Cressage's bistre hair was gathered in careless fashion to a loose knot at the back of the head, and in her exquisitely modeled face

there was no hint whatever of docility or awed submission to any external claims. The profile of this countenance, outlined for the moment against a cluster of vividly purple pleroma blossoms, had the delicacy of a rare flower, but it conveyed also the impression of resolute and enduring force. If the dome above could have generated voices of its own, these would have murmured to one another that here at last was a woman whom Caermere could not break or even easily bend.

In the season of 1892, London had heard a good deal of this lady. She was unknown before, and of her belongings people to this day knew and cared very little. There was a General Kervick enumerated in the retired list, who had vegetated into promotion in some obscure corner of India, and now led an equally inconspicuous existence somewhere in the suburbs—or was it in West Kensington? He had never belonged to a service club, but an occasional man encountered him once in a while at the Oriental, where he was supposed by the waiters to have an exceptional knowledge of peppers and chutneys. The name of his wife had been vaguely associated with charitable committees, or subscription committees, and here and there some one remembered having

heard that she was distantly related to somebody. The elder Kervicks never secured a much more definite place in London's regard—even after this remarkable daughter had risen like a planet to dim the fixed stars of the season.

The credit for having discovered and launched Miss Kervick came generally to be ascribed to Lady Selton, but perhaps this turned upon the fact that she lent her house in Park Lane for the culminating scene in the spectacular triumph of that young person. No doubt there were others who would have placed still bigger houses at the disposal of a bride whose wedding was, in many respects, the most interesting of the year, and some of these may have had as good a claim to the privilege as Lady Selton. As matters turned out, however, they were given no cause to repine. The marriage was not a success, and within one short year Lady Selton herself had grown a little shy about assuming responsibility for it. A year later she was quite prepared to repudiate all share in it, and after that people ceased to remember about it all, until the shock of the tragedy came to stir polite London into startled whisperings.

Hardly within the memory of living folk had a family been dealt such a swift suc-

cession of deadly blows as these which were rained upon the Torrs in the first half of 1896.

The Earl of Porlock had been the heir of dukedom since most people could remember, and had got himself called to the House of Lords in his own right, apparently as a kind of protest against his father's unconscionable longevity, at least a dozen years before his own end came. It was not to be supposed that he desired a peerage for any other reason, since he had never chosen to seek a seat in the House of Commons, and indeed, save upon one occasion connected with ground game, made no use whatever of his legislative powers after they had been given to him. He cared nothing for politics, and read scarcely more in newspapers than in books. Up to middle life, he had displayed a certain tendency toward interest in fat stock and a limited number of allied agricultural topics, but the decline in farming values had turned him from this. In his earlier years, too, he had enjoyed being identified with the sporting set of his class in London, and about the racing circuit, but this association he also dropped out of as he grew older, partly because late nights bored him, partly because he could no longer afford to jeopardize any portion of his income. He

came at last to think of his mastership of hounds as his principal tie to existence on land. He liked it all, from the sailing sweep over the highest barrier in an exceptionally rough country, to the smell of the kennels of an early morning across the frozen yards. This life with the horses and dogs, and with the people who belonged to the horses and dogs, offered fewer temptations to the evil temper in his blood than any other, and with growing years his dislike for the wear and tear of getting angry had become a controlling instinct. He continued to use bad language with an appropriate show of fervency, when occasion required, but he had got out of the way of scalding himself with rage inside. He even achieved a grim sort of jocularity toward the close. In the last year of his life a tenant-farmer, speaking to a toast, affirmed of him that "a truer sportsman, nor yet a more humorous and affable nobleman, has never taken the chair at a puppy-walk luncheon within my recollection," and this tribute to his geniality both pleased and impressed the earl. He was then in his sixty-second year, and he might have lived into a mellowed, and even jovial old age, under the influence of this praise, had there been no unwritten law ending the hunting season in the early spring.

The earl cared very little for otters and rats, and almost nothing at all for salmon, so that when April came he usually went to his yacht, and practically lived aboard it until November. Sometimes he made long cruises in this substantial and comfortable vessel, which he delighted in navigating himself. He was lying in at Bremerhaven, for example, in May, when one of a sheaf of telegrams scattered along the line of North Sea ports in search of him, brought the news that his youngest son Joseph, who had drifted into Mashonaland after the collapse of the Jameson adventure, had been killed in the native rebellion. Upon consideration, the earl could not see that a post-haste return to England would serve any useful end. He sailed westward, however, after some telegraphic communication with England, and made his leisurely way down the Channel and round Cornwall to Milford Haven, where his wont was to winter his yacht, and where most of his crew were at home. The fact that he and the vessel were well known in this port rendered it possible to follow in detail subsequent events.

It was on the 10th of June that Lord Porlock came to anchor in Milford, and went ashore, taking the afternoon train for Shrewsbury. He returned on the 14th,

accompanied by his eldest son and heir, Lord Cressage. This latter personage was known only from hearsay at Milford, and local observation of him was therefore stimulated by a virgin curiosity. It was noted that Viscount Cressage—a stalwart and rubicund young man of more than his father's height, but somewhat less swarthy of aspect—was laboring under very marked depression. He hung about the hotel, during the delay incident upon cleaning up the yacht, taking on new stores and altering some of the sailing gear, in a plainly moping mood, saying little to his father and never a word to any one else. A number of witnesses were able to make it clear that at first he did not intend to sail forth, but was merely bearing his father company while the latter remained in harbor.

The fact of their recent bereavement accounted in a general way for their reticence with each other, but it was impossible not to see that the younger man had something besides the death of a brother on his mind. When, on the second day of their waiting, the tide began to fill in which on its turn was to bear out the yacht, his nervous preoccupation grew painfully manifest. He walked across many times to the headland; he fidgeted in and out of the bar,

taking drinks for which he obviously had no relish, and looking over and over again in the railway time-tables for information which he seemed incapable of fixing in his memory. At last, when everything was ready, and the earl stood with his hand out to say good-bye to his son, the latter had suddenly, and upon the evident impulse of the moment, declared with some excitement that he also would go. People remembered that he had said, as if in defensive explanation of his hasty resolve: "Perhaps that will teach her a lesson!" His father had only remarked "Rot!"—and with that the yacht sailed off, a heaving white patch against the blackening west.

But what followed was too grossly unreasoning to afford a lesson to anybody. The morning newspapers of the 18th contained in one column confirmation of the earlier report that the Hon. Anselm Torr, second son of the earl of Porlock, had been a passenger on the ill-fated "Drummond Castle," and had gone down with the rest in the night off Ushant; and in another column a telegram from Porthstinian, announcing the total loss of a large yacht, on the rocks known as the Bishop and Clerks, with all on board. The evening papers followed with the rumor that the lost yacht was the "Minstrel," with both Lord Porlock

and his son, Lord Cressage, on board; but it was not until the next afternoon that the public possessed all the facts in this extraordinary affair. Then it happened that the edge was rather taken off the horror of the tragic coincidence, by the announcement that these sudden deaths brought forward as next heir to the dukedom Captain Edward Torr, late of the —th Hussars, who was better known, perhaps, as the husband of Miss Cora Bayard. The thought of Cora as a prospective duchess made such a direct appeal to the gayer side of the popular mind, that the gruesome terrors surrounding her advancement were lost to sight. When, a few days later, it was stated that the venerable Duke of Glastonbury had suffered a stroke of paralysis, and lay at Caermere in a critical state, the news only made more vivid the picture of the music-hall dancer turned into Her Grace which the public had in its mind's eye. Her radiant portrait in the photographic weeklies and budgets was what remained uppermost in the general memory.

For a time, however, in that little fraction of the public which is called Society, the figure of another woman concentrated interest upon itself, in connection with the Torr tragedy. The fact that a music-hall person

was to wear a great title had no permanent hold upon the imagination of this class. They would probably see rather less of her then than now—and the thing had no longer the charm of the unusual. But they had known Lady Cressage. They had admired her, followed after her, done all sorts of nice things for her, in that season of her wonderful triumph as the most beautiful girl, and the most envied bride, in London. After her marriage she had been very little in evidence, it was true; one hardly knew of any other reigning beauty who had let the sceptre slip through her fingers so promptly and completely. What was the secret of it all? It could not be said that she had lost her good looks, or that she was lacking in cleverness. There was no tangible scandal against her; to the contrary, she seemed rather surprisingly indifferent to men's company. Of course, it was understood that her marriage was unhappy, but that was scarcely a reason for allowing herself to be so wholly snuffed out of social importance. Everybody knew what the Torrs were like as husbands, and everybody would have been glad to be good to her. But in some unaccountable way, without quite producing the effect of rebuffing kindness, she had contrived to lapse from the place prepared for

her. And now those last words from the lips of poor young Cressage—"Perhaps that will teach her a lesson!"—sifted their way from the coroner's inquest in a Welsh village up to London, and set people thinking once more. Who could tell? It might be that the fault was not all on one side. According to the accounts of Milford, he was in a state of visible excitement and mental distress. The very fact of his going off alone in a yacht with his father, of whom he notoriously saw as little as possible on dry land, showed that he must have been greatly upset. And his words could mean nothing save that it was a quarrel with his wife which had sent him off to what proved to be his death. What was this quarrel about? And was it the woman, after all, who was to blame? Echoes of these questions, and of their speculative and varied answers, kept themselves alive here and there in London till Parliament rose in August. They were lost then in the general flutter toward the moors.

Lady Cressage, meantime, had not quitted Caermere or disclosed any design of doing so, and it is there we return to her, where she sat at her ease under the palms in the glass-house, with a book open before her.

The spattering reports of a number of

guns, not very far away, caused her presently to lift her head, but after an instant, with a fleeting frown, she went back to her book. The racket continued, and finally she closed the volume, listened with a vexed face for a minute or two and then sprang to her feet.

"Positively this is too bad!" she declared aloud, to herself.

Unexpectedly, as she turned, she found confronting her another young woman, also clad in black, even to the point of long gloves, and a broad hat heavy with funereal plumes. In her hand she held some unopened letters, and on her round, smooth, pretty countenance there was a doubtful look.

"Good-mornin', dear," said this newcomer. Her voice, not unmusical in tone, carried the suggestion of being produced with sedulous regard to a system. "There were no letters for you."

There was a momentary pause, and then Lady Cressage, as if upon deliberation, answered, "Good-morning — Cora." She turned away listlessly as she spoke.

"Ah, so it *is* one of my 'Cora' days, after all," said the other, with a long breath of ostentatious reassurance. "I never know in the least where to have you, my dear, you know—and particularly this mornin'; I made sure you'd blame me for the guns."

"Blame"—commented Lady Cressage, musingly—"I no longer blame anybody for anything. I've long since done with my fancy for playing at being God, and distributing judgments about among people."

"Oh, you're quite right about this shootin' the home covers," protested the other. "I gave Eddy a fair bit of my mind about it—but you know what he is, when once he's headed in a given direction. You might as well talk soft to the east wind. And, for that matter, I was dead against his bringin' these men down here at all—though it may surprise you to hear it."

Lady Cressage, still looking away, shook her head very slightly. "No—I don't find myself particularly surprised," she said, with an effect of languor. "Really, I can't be said to have given the matter a thought, one way or the other. It is neither my business nor my wish to form opinions about your husband's friends. We were speaking of something else, were we not?"

"Why, yes," responded Mrs. Edward; "I mentioned that sometimes I'm 'Cora,' and sometimes it's very much the other way about. I merely mentioned it—don't think I mean to complain—only I began calling *you* Edith from the start—from the first day I came here, after the—after the—"

"I know you did. It was very kind of you," murmured Edith, but with no affectation of gratitude in her voice. Then, slowly, she turned her eyes toward her companion, and added in a more considerate tone: "But then you are by nature a much kindlier person than I am."

"Oh, yes, you say that," put in the other, "but it isn't true, you know. It's only that I've seen more of the world, and am so much older than you are. That's what tells, my dear—it's years that smooths the temper down, and rubs off one's sharp corners—of course, if one has some sense to start with. I assure you, Edith, that when I was your age I was a perfect tiger-cat."

Lady Cressage smiled in a wan fashion, as if in despite of her mood. "You always make such a point of your seniority," she said, not unamiably, "but when I look at you, I can never believe you're of any age at all. I seem a thousand years old beside you."

Mrs. Edward showed some dazzling teeth in her pleased appreciation of the compliment. Her smile was as characteristic as her voice, in its studiously regular and equable distribution. The even parting of her bright lips, with their symmetrical inner lines of white, was supported to a nicety of proportional value by eyelashes and eyes.

"It's what I've been saying," she commented, with frank enjoyment. "It's good temper that does the trick."

To tell the truth, Mrs. Edward's was a face which bore no visible relation to years. It was of rounded oval in contour, with beautifully chiseled small features, a faultless skin which was neither fair nor dark and fine large eyes that seemed sometimes blue, and as often something else. In these eyes there lay always, within touch of the surface, a latent smile, ready to beam, to sparkle, to dance, to languish in mellow softness or glitter in cool abstract recognition of pleasantries afloat, all at the instant bidding of the lips below. These lips, delicately arched and of vivid warmth of color, were as restricted in their movements as is the mercury in a thermometer. They did not curl sidewise upon occasion; they never pouted, or pulled themselves inward together under the stress of sudden emotion. They did nothing but separate, in perfectly balanced measure, sometimes by only a hair's breadth, again in the freest fashion, but always in painstaking harmony with the spirit of the glance above. Students of this smile, or rather of this range of graded smiles, ordinarily reached the conclusion that it was the lips which gave the signal to

the eyes. Certain it is that they worked together in trained accord, and that the rest of the face did nothing at all. The white forehead furrowed itself with no lines of puzzled thought; there was not the shadow of a wrinkle at the corners of the little mouth, or about the shapely brown lashes—and it seemed incredible that time should ever bring one.

Beside this serene and lovely mask—in the placidity of which one found the pledge of an easy temper along with the promise of unfailing youth—the face of Lady Cressage was still beautiful, but in a restless and strenuous way. If she did produce the effect of being the older of the two, it was because Mrs. Edward's countenance had nothing to do with any such standard of comparison.

"When you come to think of it," the latter went on now, "you *do* seem older than I do, dear—I mean you seem so to me. Of course I know there's a good six years' difference between us—and as far as appearance goes, I needn't say that you'd be the belle of the ball in London as easily as you were four years ago—but all the same you have the knack of making me feel as if I were the youngster, and you the grown-up. I've a sister—five years younger than me—and she does the same thing. When she

looks at me—just quietly turns her eyes full on me, you know—it seems as if I ought to have a pinafore on, and she have spectacles and a cap. Oh, she used to give me the jumps, that girl did. We haven't seen much of each other, these last few years; we didn't hit it off particularly well—but—why, hello! this *is* odd, if you like!"

"What is it?" asked the other, perfunctorily.

Mrs. Edward had been shuffling the envelopes in her hand the while she spoke, and idly noting their superscriptions. She held up one of them now, in explanation of her remark.

"Well, talk of the devil, you know—I was speaking of my sister Frank, and here's a letter from her. She hasn't written a line to me in—how long is it?—why, it must be—well, certainly not since I was married. Funny, isn't it? I wonder if it's anything about the pater."

She continued to regard the sealed missive absent-mindedly, as if the resource of opening it had not yet suggested itself to her. In the meantime, something else occurred to her, and she turned to face Lady Cressage, who had seated herself again.

"I meant what I said about these men Eddy's brought down," she declared. "I

didn't want them to be asked, and I don't like their being here, any more than you do. Yes, I want to have you understand," she persisted, as the other offered a gesture of deprecation, "I hope I'm the last person in the world to round on old pals, but really, as I told Eddy, a man in his position must draw the line somewhere. I don't mind giving a leg-up to old Pirie—in a quiet way, of course—for he's not half a bad sort by himself; but as for the rest, what are they? I don't care for their families or their commissions—I've seen too much of the world to be taken in by kid of that sort—I say they're bounders. I never was what you might call keen about them as the right friends for Eddy, even before—I mean in the old days, when it didn't matter so much what company he kept. But now, with everything so altered, he ought to see that they're not in his class at all. And that's just what I can't get him to do in the least."

"Men have their own views in these matters. They are often rather difficult to understand," commented Edith, sententiously.

"I should think so!" began Mrs. Edward. "Why, if I were a man, and in Eddy's place—"

Her words had ended aimlessly, as her

eyes followed the lines of the letter she had at last opened and begun to read. She finished the brief task, and then, going back to the top of the single page, went over it again more attentively. There was something indefinably impressive about the silence in which she did this, and Lady Cressage presently raised an inquiring glance. Mrs. Edward's face exhibited no marked change of expression, but it had turned deathly pale. The unabated redness of the lips gave this pallor a ghastliness which frightened Edith, and brought her to her feet.

"What in the name—" she began, but the other held up a black-gloved hand.

"Is this something you know about?—something you've been putting up?" Cora demanded, in a harsh, ungoverned voice, moving forward as she spoke. "Look at this. Here's what my sister writes." She did not offer to show the letter, but huskily read forth its contents:

"'London, September 30.

"'My dear Cora: I don't know whether you will thank me or not, but I feel that some one ought to warn you, if only that you may pull yourself together to meet what is coming. Your house is built of cards, and it is only a question of days, perhaps of

hours, when it will be pushed over. Your husband is not the heir, after all. I am truly in great grief at the thought of what this will mean to you, and I can only hope that you will believe me when I sign myself,

" 'Your sincerely affectionate sister,

" 'FRANCES.' "

The two women exchanged a tense look in which sheer astonishment encountered terror, and mingled with it.

"No, I know nothing of this," faltered Edith, more in response to the other's wild eyes than to the half-forgotten inquiries that had prefaced the reading of the letter.

"No trick of a child, eh? What do they call it, posthumous?" Cora panted, still with the rough voice which had shaken off the yoke of tuition.

Edith lifted her head. "That is absurd," she answered, curtly.

As they confronted each other thus, a moving shadow outside caught their notice. Instinctively turning their eyes, they beheld through the glass a stranger, a slender young man with a soft hat of foreign fashion, striding across the lawn away from the house. He held his head high in the air, and they could see that the hands carried stiffly outstretched at his sides were clenched.

"He struts across the turf as if he owned it," said Edith, clutching vaguely at the meaningless relief which this interruption seemed to offer.

But Mrs. Edward had sunk into the chair, and buried her face in her black-gloved hands.

CHAPTER V

Christian began his walk with swift, energetic steps, and a guiding eye fixed resolutely on a distinguishing mark in the distant line of tree-tops beyond, as if both speed and directness of course were of utmost urgency to his purpose. While his body moved forward thus automatically, however, his mind remained engrossed with what had been said and done in the room he was leaving behind.

His brain reproduced over and over again the appearance of the two young brothers, their glances at each other, their sneering scowls at him. The picture of Augustine whispering in Edward's ear, and of Edward shaking his sulky head, stuck in his memory as a living thing. He had continued to see it after he had turned his back on them and gone to the window. The infamous words which had been spoken about his father were a part of this picture, and their inflection still rang in his ears just as the young men still stood before his eyes, compact of hostility to him and his blood.

The noise of guns in the wood he approached was for a time subordinated in his mind to those bitter echoes of Edward's speech. When at last these reports of firing attracted his attention, he had passed out of sight of Caermere, and found himself on a vaguely defined path at the end of a broad heath, much overgrown with heather and broom and low, straggling, inhospitable-looking shrubs novel to his eye. Curious movements among this shaggy verdure caught his wandering notice, and he stopped to observe them more closely. A great many rabbits—or would they be hares?—were making their frightened escape from the wood in front of him, and darting about for cover in this undergrowth. He became conscious now of an extraordinary tumult in the wood itself—a confused roar of men's voices raised in apparently meaningless cries, accompanied by an unintelligible pounding of sticks on timber and crackling brush. This racket almost drowned the noise of the remote firing; its effect of consternation upon the small inhabitants of the thicket was only less than the bewilderment that it caused in Christian's mind. Forgetting altogether his own concerns, he pushed cautiously forward to spy out the cause of the commotion.

Somewhat later, he emerged from the wood again, having obtained a tolerable notion of what was going on. He had caught a view of one line of beaters making their way through a copse, diagonally away from him—rough men clad for the most part in white jackets, who shouted and thrashed about them with staves as they went—and it was easy enough to connect their work, and the consequent rise and whirring rush of birds before it, with the excited fusillade of guns farther on. Christian did not get a sight of the sportsmen themselves. Albeit with some doubts as to the dignity of the proceeding, he made a detour of the piece of woodland, with the idea of coming out upon the shooting party, but when he arrived at the barrier it was to find on the spot only a couple of men in greenish corduroys, whom he took to be underkeepers. They were at work before a large heap of pheasants, tying the birds in pairs by the necks, and hanging them over a long stick, stretched between two trees, which already bent under its burden. They glanced up from their employment at Christian, and when he stooped to pick up one of the cartridge cases with which the ground at his feet was strewn, they exchanged some muttered comment at which both laughed aloud. He instinctively

threw the little tube down, and looked away from the men. The thought occurred to him that if they only knew who he was their confusion would be pathetic, but as it was, they had the monopoly of self-possession, and it was he who shyly withdrew.

The whole diversion, however, had cleared and sweetened his mood. He retraced his steps through the wood and then struck off in a new direction across the heath, at a more leisurely pace than he had come, his mind dwelling pleasurably upon the various picturesque phases of what he had witnessed. The stray glimpses of *la chasse* which had been afforded him in the South had had nothing in common with this. The unkempt freedom of the growths about him appealed to his senses as cultivated parks and ordered forests had never done. It was all so strong and simple and natural—and the memory of the beaters smashing along in the thicket, bawling and laying about them with their clubs, gave it a primitive note which greatly pleased his fancy.

The heath was even finer, in his eyes, than the wood. The air stirring across it, for one thing, had a quality which he seemed never to have known before—and the wild, almost savage, aspect of its squat gray and russet herbage, the sense of a splendidly unashamed

idleness and unproductiveness suggested by its stretches of waste land, charmed his imagination. He said to himself, as he sauntered here, that he would gallop every day across this wonderful plain, with a company of big dogs at his horse's heels. The thought of the motion in the saddle inspired him to walk faster. He straightened himself, put his hands to his coat at the breast as he had seen young Englishmen do on their pedestrian tours, and strode briskly forward, humming to himself as he moved. The hateful episode of the morning had not so much faded from his thoughts, as shaken itself into a new kaleidoscopic formation. Contact with these noble realities out of doors had had the effect, as it were, of immeasurably increasing his stature. When he thought of those paltry cousins of his, it was as if he looked down upon their insignificance from a height.

He came at last face to face with a high stone wall, the pretensions and obvious antiquity of which told him at once that he had returned to the vicinity of the castle. Sure enough, there were discernible at a considerable distance down to the right some of the turrets and roofs of Caermere, and he turned his course in that direction. It seemed to him a long way that he walked by

the side of this great wall, marveling as he did so at its size and at the ambitious views of the persons who built it. The reflection that they were ancestors of his own came to his mind, and expanded therein. He also would build like a great nobleman in his time! What was there so grand as building?—he mused as he looked about him—unless it might be the heath and the brownish-purple hills beyond, and these also one intuitively thought of as having been built.

Presently a small doorway appeared in the massive wall, and Christian, finding it unlocked, passed through it into a vast garden. The inner and sunny side of the wall, as far as he could see in either direction, was veined with the regularly espaliered branches of dwarf trees flattened against it, from which still depended here and there belated specimens of choice fruit. On the other side of the path following close this wall, down which he proceeded, were endless rows of small trees and staked clumps of canes, all now bereft of their season's produce. The spectacle did not fit with what had been mentioned to him of the poverty of Caermere. Farther on, a tall hedge stretching at right angles from the wall separated this orchard from what he saw now, by glimpses through an open arch, to

be a flower garden. He quickened his pace at the sight, for flowers were very near his heart.

At first there was not much to move his admiration. The sunlit profusion of his boyhood's home had given him standards of size and glowing color which were barely approached, and nowhere equaled, here. Suddenly he came upon something, however, before which he perforce stopped. It was the beginning of a long row of dahlias, rounded flowers on the one side of him, pointed and twisted cactus varieties on the other, and he had imagined nothing like this before in his life. Apparently no two of the tall plants, held upright to the height of his breast by thick stakes, were alike, and he knew not upon which to expend the greater delight, the beauty of their individual blossoms or the perfection of skill exhibited in the color-arrangement of the line.

He moved slowly along, examining the more notable flowers in detail with such ardor that a young lady in a black gown, but with a broad hat of light straw on her pale hair, advanced up the path, paused, and stood quite near him for some moments before he perceived her presence. Then with a little start, he took off his hat, and held it in his hands while he made a stiff bow.

"You are fond of flowers?" Lady Cressage said, more as a remark than an inquiry. She observed him meanwhile with politely calm interest.

"These dăhlias are extraordinary!" he exclaimed, very earnestly. "I have never seen such flowers, and such variety. It surprises me a great deal. It is a spécialité in England, n'est ce pas?"

"I think I have heard that we have carried the dăhlia further than other countries have done," responded the lady, courteously giving the name the broad-voweled sound he had used. She added with a pleasant softening of eyes and lips: "But you ought not to begrudge us one little triumph like this—you who come from the very paradise of flowers."

The implication in her words caused him to straighten himself, and to regard her with a surprised new scrutiny. He saw now that she was very beautiful, and he strove to recall the few casual remarks Lord Julius had dropped concerning the two ladies at the castle, as a clue to her identity. One had been an actress, he remembered—and this lady's graceful equanimity had, perhaps, something histrionic in it. But if she happened not to be the actress, then it would no doubt anger her very much to be taken

for one. He knew so little of women—and then his own part in the small drama occurred to him.

"It is evident that you understand who I am," he said, with another bow. The further thought that in either case she was related to him, was a part of the family of which he would soon be the head, came to give him fresh confidence. "It is not only dăhlias that are carried to unrivaled heights of beauty in England," he added, and bowed once more.

She smiled outright at this. "That is somewhat too—what shall I say?—continental for these latitudes," she remarked. "Men don't say such glowing things in England. We haven't sun enough, you know, properly to ripen rose-hips—or compliments. I should like to introduce myself, if I may—I am Edith Cressage—and Lord Julius has told me the wonderful story about you."

She held out her hand as she spoke, with a deliberate gesture, which afforded Christian time to note its exquisite modeling, if he had had the eyes for it. But he took the hand in his own rather cursorily, and began speaking with abruptness before he had finished his bow and relinquished it.

"It is much too wonderful," he said, hastily. "It frightens me. I cannot get

used to it. I have the feeling that I should go away somewhere, and live by myself, till it became all familiar to me. But then I see it would be just as painful, wherever I went."

"Oh, let us hope it would be least painful here, of all places," urged the lady, in gentle deprecation of his tone. "Caermere is not gay, but it can be soothing and restful—to those who stand in need of solace. It has come to be my second home—I never thought one could grow so deeply attached to a place. It has been to me like a tender old nurse and confidante—in times when—when its shelter and consolation were very welcome"—she faltered for an instant, with averted face, then raised her moist eyes to his, and let them sparkle—"and oh, you will grow to love Caermere with all your heart."

Christian felt himself much moved. He had put on his hat, and stepped now to her side.

"I have seen nothing of it at all," he said. "I am going to ask that you shall show it to me—you who love it so much. But if I shall remain here now, that I cannot in the least tell. Nothing is arranged, so far as I know. I am quite in Lord Julius' hands—thus far."

They had tacitly begun to move down the path together, loitering to look at plants

on either side which particularly invited notice.

"Lord Julius is a remarkable man," she said. "If one is fortunate enough to enlist his friendship, there is no end to what he can do for him. You can hardly imagine what a difference it makes for you in everything—the fact that he is warmly disposed towards you."

"Yes, that I have been told," said Christian, "and I see it for myself, too. I do not feel that I know him very well, as yet. It was only yesterday morning that I met him for the first time at an hotel in Brighton. We breakfasted together, we looked through papers together and then we began a long railway journey together, which only ended a few hours ago. We have talked a great deal in this time, but, as I have said, the man himself is not very clear to me yet. But no one could have been kinder—and I think he likes me."

"Oh, of course he does," affirmed Lady Cressage, as if anything else would have been incredible. "And—talking with him so much, so continuously, you no doubt understand the entire situation. I am glad that he at least left it to me to show you over Caermere; there is apparently nothing else in which I can be of use."

Christian, though he smiled in kindly

recognition of her attitude, offered no verbal comment, and after a wandering digression about dahlias, she returned to the subject.

"If there *is* anything I can tell you—about the family, the position of affairs in general, and so on—you should not stand on ceremony with me. Has he, for example, explained about money affairs?"

The young man looked keenly at her for an instant, as if the question took him by surprise. Then he answered frankly enough: "Nothing definite. I only gather that it will be made easier for me than it would have been for—for other members of the family, if they—had been in my place. But perhaps that is not what I should say to you."

Lady Cressage smiled on him reassuringly.

"Oh, don't think of me in that light," she pleaded. "I stand quite outside the—what shall I say?—the interested family circle. I have no ax of any description to grind. You, of course, have been told my position in the castle—that is, so far as it can be told by others. It is a simple enough story—I was to have been everything, and then the wind happens to change off the Welsh coast and lo! I am nothing—nothing! It is not even certain that I am not a beggar—living

here on alms. Legally, everything is in such confusion that no one knows how he stands. But so far as I am concerned, it doesn't matter. My cup has been filled so full—so long—that a little more or less trouble is of no importance. Oh, I assure you, I do not desire to be considered in the matter at all."

She made this last declaration with great earnestness, in immediate response to the sympathetic look and gesture with which Christian had interrupted her narrative.

His gentle eyes regarded her troubled beauty with compassionate softness. "I venture to think that you will be considered a good deal, none the less," he remarked, in a grave yet eager tone. The sense of elation at being able to play the part of Providence to such a lady spread through his mind and possessed his being. The lofty possibilities of the powers devolving upon him had never been so apparent before. He instinctively put out his arm toward her, in such overt fashion that she could but take it. She did not lean upon it, but imparted to the contact instead a kind of ceremonial reserve which directly ministered to the patrician side of his mood.

They walked, if possible, still more slowly now, pausing before almost every stake;

their talk was of the flowers, with occasional lapses into the personal.

"What you said about Lord Julius," she remarked, in one of these interludes, "is quite true. He has it in his power to say whether the duke shall be a rich man or a pauper, and until yesterday he was all for the pauper. If poor Porlock and his sons had lived, they knew very well that Lord Julius was no friend of theirs, and would starve the title whichever of them had it. And so with these others—Edward and Augustine—only with them, it isn't merely dislike but loathing that Lord Julius has for them."

"I met those young gentlemen this morning," said Christian stiffly. "It seemed to me that Lord Julius went quite out of his way to be kind with them. I should never have gathered that he hated them."

"Oh, not personally," she explained. "I don't think he dislikes anybody personally. But in what you may call their representative capacity he is furious with people if they don't measure up to his idea of what they should be. I never heard of any other family that had such a man in it. I used to admire him very much—when I was newly married—I thought his ideals for the family were so noble and fine—but I don't know—"

"Do you have suspicions of Julius, then?" asked Christian, hurriedly.

"Oh, no, no!" she protested. "Nothing is farther from my thoughts. Only I have seen it all, here. I have lived in the very heart of it—and much as I sympathize with his feelings, I can't help feeling that he is unjust—not willfully, but still unjust. He and his son are men of great intelligence and refined tastes; they would do honor to any position. But is it quite fair of them to be so hard on cousins of theirs who were not given great intelligence, and who had no capacity whatever for refinement? That is what I mean. You saw those young men this morning. They are not up to much, certainly; their uncle Porlock and his sons averaged, perhaps, even a shade lower—you see I am speaking quite frankly—but when it is all said and done, they were not so remarkably worse than other men of their class. If any of the six had succeeded to the title, he would not have been such a startling anomaly in the peerage. I doubt if he would have attracted attention, one way or the other. But it became a fixed idea with Lord Julius years ago to get control of the estates, and to use this control to bully the elder line into the paths of sweetness and light. It didn't succeed in the least—

and I think he grew a little spiteful. That is all. And besides—what does it matter? It is all ancient history now."

Christian was looking straight before him, with a meditative gaze. They walked for some moments in silence before he spoke. "And how did he know that he would like me?" he demanded, musingly. "How should he be confident that I was better than the others? Perhaps—do you know?—was he very fond of my father?"

"I have no idea," she responded. It was impossible not to note the brevity of her tone.

"No one speaks willingly of my father," he broke forth with impulsive bitterness. "Even Lord Julius would tell me nothing of him. And the young lady on the boat—she too—"

He paused, and his companion, who had been looking away, glanced again at him. "The young lady on the boat," she said, more by way of suggesting to him a safe topic than as an inquiry.

"Oh, I much want to know who she can be," he cried, unconsciously accepting the diversion. He described the meeting at Rouen, the conversation and, after a fashion of his own, the girl herself. "She said," he went on, "that she had personally something

to do with the story—'remótely' was the word she used. I asked Lord Julius, but he could not think who she might be. She earns her own living—she told me that—and she had never been out of England before. She is not well educated—in the school sense, I mean—her French was ridiculous. But she spoke very beautifully her own language, and her mind filled me with charm, but even more so her good heart. We swore friendship for all time—or at least I did."

"Dear me!" said Lady Cressage. Her thoughts had not been idle, and they brought to her now on the instant a satisfactory clue. She pondered it for a little, before she decided to speak. "I think I know who this remarkable young lady must be," she observed then. "This Captain Edward whom you met this morning—he has a wife."

"Yes, I know," put in Christian abruptly —"the actress-lady; Julius told me of her."

"I suppose 'actress' would cover the thing," she answered, with an air of amiable indifference. "She danced more than she acted, I believe, but 'actress' is a very general term. Well, your eternal friend is, I suspect, her younger sister. I have never seen her, but by accident I happen to know

that she is aware of your coming to England."

Christian's mobile face had lengthened somewhat. "Is she also an—an 'actress'?" he asked, dolefully.

Lady Cressage looked skyward, with half-closed eyes, in an effort of memory. "I really seem to have heard what she did," she mused, hesitatingly. "I know her sister has often spoken of her. Is it 'barmaid'? No. 'Telegraph'? No, it's her father who's in the General Post Office. Why, now, how stupid of me! She can't be a nurse, of course, or there would have been her uniform. Oh, now I remember—she's a typewriter."

It was not clear to her whether Christian wholly comprehended the term, now that she had found it. She perceived, however, that he disliked something in what she had said, or in her manner of saying it. The remarkable responsiveness of his countenance to passing emotions and moods within him had already impressed her. She regarded his profile now with a sidelong glance, and reconstructed some of her notions about him by the help of what she saw. Nothing was said, until suddenly he paused, gazing with kindled eye upon the prospect opened before him.

They had come to the end of the garden, and stood at the summit of a broad stone-kerbed path descending in terraces. Above them, the dense foliage of the yews rising at either side of the gap in the hedge had been trained and cut into an arched canopy. From under this green gateway Christian looked down upon a Caermere he had not imagined to himself before.

The castle revealed itself for the first time, as he beheld it now, in its character as a great medieval fortress. On his arrival in the morning, emerging from the shadowed driveway into the immediate precinct of the house, he had seen only its variously modernized parts; these, as they were viewed from this altitude, shrank to their proper proportions—an inconsiderable fraction of the mighty whole. All about, the massive shoulders of big hills shelved downward to form the basin-like hollow in which the castle seemed to stand, but their large bulk, so far from dwarfing Caermere, produced the effect of emphasizing its dimensions. Its dark-gray walls and towers, with their bulging clumps of chimneys and turrets, and lusterless facets of many-angled roofings, all of somber slate, were visibly the product, the very child, of the mountains. A sensation of grim, adamantine, implacable

power took hold of the young man's brain as he gazed. For a long time he did not want to talk, and felt vaguely that he was signifying this by the slight, sustained pressure of his arm against hers. At all events, she grasped his wish, and preserved silence, holding herself a little behind him, so that he might look down, without distraction, upon his kingdom.

"These Torrs," he burst forth all at once, with a nervous uncertainty in his tones as of one out of breath, "these ancestors of mine —the family I belong to—did they produce great men? You must know their history. Julius says we are the most ancient family in England. I have not had the time yet to learn anything of what we did. Were there heroes and famous soldiers and learned scholars among us? To look at that wonderful castle there at our feet, it seems as if none but born chiefs and rulers of mankind could ever have come out of it."

"Captain Edward and his brother Augustine were both born there," she permitted her own over-quick tongue to comment.

He let her arm drop from his with a swift gesture, and wheeled round to look her in the face. The glance in his eyes said so much to her that she hastened to anticipate his speech.

"Forgive me!" she urged hastily. "It was silly thoughtlessness of mine. I do not know you at all well as yet, you know, and I say the wrong things to you. Do tell me you forgive me! And it is only fair to myself to say, too, that I have been in a bad school these last few years. Conversation as one practices it at Caermere is merely the art of making everything pointed and sharp enough to pierce thick skins. I should have remembered that you were different—it was unpardonable of me! But I have really angered you!"

Christian, still looking at her, found himself gently shaking his head in reassurance. It was plain enough to him that this beautiful young woman had suffered much, and that at the hands of his own people. What wonder that acrid memories of them should find their way to her lips? He also had been unhappy. He smiled gravely into her face at the softening recollection.

"We were speaking of different things, I think," he commented, and nodded approval at sight of the relieved change which his tone brought to her countenance. "I know very well there are many disagreeable and unpleasant matters close about us—when we are down below, there. But now we are up above them, and we forget them all, or

ignore them—and I was asking you about the history of the family—its ancient history."

She put her hand lightly upon his arm again. "Lord Julius is right about it being a very, very long history," she said, putting into her voice a tacit recognition of his magnanimity. "I know it, in a certain way, but I can hardly make a good story of it, I'm afraid. The family is Keltic, you know. That is what is always said about it, as its most distinguishing characteristic. It is the only large English one which managed to survive through the Saxon period, and then the Norman period, and keep its name and its estates and its territorial power. This makes it very interesting to historians and archæologists. There are many stone circles and Druidic monuments about here, some of which are said to be connected with the introduction of Christianity into Britain. You will see them another day, and read the legends about them. Well, it is said that the chief who possessed this land here, and who had some kind of a stronghold there where the castle is, at that time, was a Torr. Of course, there were no surnames then, but it would have been his tribal appellation, or something of the sort. The fact itself, I believe, is generally accepted—

that the family that was here in St. David's time is here now. It is a tradition that there should always be a David in the family; it used to be the leading name, but now Christian is usually the duke's name, and the others are all saints, like Anselm, Edward, Augustine and—and so forth."

The young man looked down in meditation upon the gloomy, historic pile. "It is a very grand beginning," he said, thoughtfully.

"Perhaps it was too grand for mere mortals to live up to," she ventured, with a cautious sidelong eye on him.

"I see your meaning," he assented, nodding. "Yes, no doubt it is natural. It is as if a boy were named Napoleon. He would be frightened to think what he had done to make his name and himself fit together—and very likely he would never do anything at all."

"Yes, that is it," she answered, and drew a long, consolatory breath.

They had begun to move down the wide winding path, and when they paused presently at one of the steps to note a new view of the buildings, she called his attention to something by a little exclamation and a pointing finger.

"Do you see the balcony there, up above

and to the left of the flat-topped tower—no, this side of the highest chimneys—there are figures coming out on it from the window."

"There is some one in a reclining chair, n'est ce pas?" he asked, following her finger.

"It is your grandfather," she said softly. "Those are his apartments—the rows of windows with the white woodwork. When the sun gets round to them, they bring him out—if he is strong enough. Evidently this is one of his good days."

Christian, gazing eagerly, made out beyond the attendants and the couch they bore, another figure, with a splash of white like a shield upon its front.

"Is it not Julius?" he asked swiftly, pressing her arm. "Oh, then by this time my grandfather knows of me—knows that I am here! Should you not think so? And no doubt, since it is his good day, they will take me to see him. Is that not probable?"

"I haven't the least idea," she responded, after a momentary pause, "either as to what Lord Julius has told him, or as to how much he is capable of understanding. Except from this distance, I have not seen him since he was struck down with paralysis. I know nothing of his condition beyond a stray, guarded word now and then from the

doctors. If I were a professional thief and he a crown jewel, I could not have been more securely shut out from him!"

The melancholy bitterness of her words and tone appealed to the young man. He drew her hand closer to his side by a delicate pressure of the arm. "I can see that you have been very unhappy," he said, compassionately.

"Oh-h-h!" she murmured, with a shuddering sigh. "Don't—don't speak of it, I beg of you!"

"I also have had a sad youth," he went on, unconsciously tightening his arm. "But now"—and he lifted his head and smiled—"who knows? Who shall say that the bad days are not all gone—for both of us?"

Only the flutter of the hand against his arm made answer. They walked on together down the broad sunlit path.

CHAPTER VI

At the foot of the terraced slope, the wide, graveled path down which Lady Cressage had led Christian described a foral curve to the right, across a lawn which he recognized as belonging to his morning's experiences. The angle of the high, domed conservatory recalled itself to him. Beyond it, on the same side, would be the window from which he had quitted the house.

To the left, a smaller footpath turned into still another garden, and he was glad that his companion moved this way. They were in a relatively small inclosure, hedged upon three sides by closely knit high walls of box; the straggling, untrimmed profusion of this tall growth, through which a multitude of sweet-briers thrust still farther upward their dipping and interlaced green rods, gave the place a homely if unkempt aspect. On the fourth side rose the blue-gray masonry of the castle itself—an ancient curtain stretched between two towers. The autumn sunlight lay upon this stained old wall, and warmed it, and glowed softly

among the leaves and saffron blossoms of the great rose-tree trained upon it. This garden preserved the outlines of some former quaint arrangement of walks and beds, but these were comfortably softened everywhere, and in part obscured, by the untrammeled freedom of vegetation. Even over the moldering red tiles of the paths mosses had been suffered to creep unmolested. A few late roses were in bloom here and there, and at one corner there rose a colony of graceful white lilies, the scent of which filled the air. It was all very restful and charming, and Christian, pausing to gaze about him, gave little exclamations of pleasure at what he saw.

In the center of the garden, surrounded by a low seat of weather-worn woodwork, was what seemed to be a fountain, culminating in a piece of statuary, so blackened and battered by time and storm that little could be made out of its creator's intentions. Christian, with some murmured inquiry, led the way toward this—and then perceived that Lord Julius, who had been sitting at the other and sunny side of the statue, was standing now in the path, confronting the new-comers with a friendly smile.

"This is *my* particular haunt at Caermere," he explained to the young man.

"In so huge a place, one is lost if he does not fasten upon a special corner or nook of some sort, and send down roots in it and make it his own. This was my mother's garden, and for over fifty years now I have bargained with one generation of head gardeners after another to leave it alone—as she left it. When Cheltnam came, he was so famous a person that I submitted to his budding some new varieties on the old wall-rose there—but, bless me, even that is thirty years ago—before either of you was born. I see you young people have lost no time in becoming acquainted."

Edith Cressage looked into the old gentleman's eyes for a moment before she replied. They had exchanged this same glance—on her side at once puzzled, suspicious, defiant; on his full of a geniality possibly pointed with cynicism—very often during the last four years, without affecting by it any prepossession or prejudice in either's mind. "We met by accident in the upper fruit-walk, and I introduced myself. It must be quite luncheon time. Shall we go in?" She added, as upon an afterthought, and with another steadfast look into his face, "I have promised to show him over the house and the castle."

"Admirable!" said Lord Julius, cordially.

He looked at his watch. "We will follow you in a very few moments, if we may. I dare say he is as ready for luncheon as I am, but I want to show him my old garden first."

"Oh, let me stop too!" she exclaimed, without an instant's hesitation. "May I confess it?—when you're not here I call it *my* garden, too. I knew it was your mother's—and I was always going to ask you to tell me about her, but the opportunity never offered. It is the one really perfect spot at Caermere, even to me. And I can understand how infinitely these old associations add to its charms for you! I shall truly not be in the way if I stop?"

The elder man regarded her with a twinkling eye from under his broad hat-brim as he shook his head. "To the contrary, we are both delighted," he answered, amiably enough. He began leading the way at this, and the two young people, walking perforce very close together on the narrow path, followed at his heels.

He pointed out to them that the fountain, which he could not remember being in working order even in his boyhood, was built over the ancient well of the castle. The statue apparently dated from William and Mary's time; at least, it was very like

the objects they set up at Hampton Court. Part of its pedestal was made of three Ogham stones, which were said to have stood by the well in former times. Flint knives and other primitive weapons had been found in the garden. Antiquaries were not agreed as to the possibility of the well having been in existence at any very remote period, but it was not unlikely that this small garden had been the center of interest —perhaps the scene of Druidical sacrifices, or even of the famous conversion of the tribe resident here by St. David—at the beginning of things. These speculations as to precise localities were interesting, but scarcely convincing. The wall at the end was a more definite affair. It had been built after the Third Crusade by Stephen de la Tour, as the Normanized name went then.

"Ah, the name has not always been spelled the same then?" interrupted Christian here. He spoke with an eagerness which the abstract interest of the query seemed hardly to warrant.

"Heavens, no!" said Lord Julius. "It has been Tor with one 'r' and with two; it has been de la Tour, as I said, and Tour without the 'de la,' and Toure, and I know of at least one branch of the people of the name

of Tower who are undoubtedly of our stock. It is quite conceivable that many others of them are, too."

"Then the forms of names can be altered at will?" pursued Christian. "If a man says, 'I will spell it so and so,' then it is all right?"

"Oh, yes," explained the other. "Often two spellings exist side by side. Witness the Seymours a few years ago. You had one brother writing it Seymour and another St. Maur. The latter is now the official spelling—for the present, at least."

"This is extremely interesting to me," the young man cried. "So I may keep my name as I have always borne it! I may write myself 'Christian Tower'! That lifts a load from my mind. I had been unhappy to think of abandoning the name my father liked. He always both spelled and pronounced it 'Tower,' and that is why I shall be so glad to do the same."

An acute kind of silence rested upon the group for an awkward minute.

"Oh, don't let us have any more archæology before luncheon, Lord Julius," put in the lady then. "Caermere so reeks with history that one must take it in small installments or be overwhelmed altogether. You were going to tell us about your mother,

Lord Julius, and how you remember her, here in this dear old garden. And positively nothing has been changed since!"

"I mustn't go quite so far as that," said the old man, smilingly. He seemed grateful to her for the digression. "A certain systematic renovation has, of course, been necessary; I have arranged with the gardeners to manage that. I dare say there are scarcely any plants or roots here now which were individually in existence in my mother's time; but their children, their descendants, are here in their places. Except for Cheltnam's buds on the wall there, I don't think any novelties have been introduced. If so, it was against my wish. The lilies in that corner, for example, are lineal progeny, heaven knows how many times removed, of the lilies my mother planted there. These roses are slips from other slips of the old cabbage and damask and moss roses she used to sit and look at with her crewel-work in her lap. The old flowers are gone, and yet they are not gone. In the same way, my mother has been dead for sixty years, and yet this is still her garden, and she is still here—here in the person of me, her son, and of Christian, her great-grandson."

"And I," commented Lady Cressage,

upon a sudden smiling impulse, "I alone am an intruding new species—like one of Cheltnam's 'niphetos' buds on the old rose. I hasten to extricate myself." And with a bright little nod and mock half-courtesy, she caught her gown in one hand, wheeled round and moved quickly down the path and through the hedge.

The two men watched her till she vanished.

"She is a beautiful lady," observed Christian, with enthusiasm; "and very courteous, too."

Lord Julius offered no remark upon this, but stood for a little with his gaze apparently fixed on the point whence she had disappeared. Then, without turning his head, he said in a gently grave way:

"If I were you, Christian, I would make as few allusions, in mixed company, to my father as possible."

"Ah, yes! this is what I desired to discuss with you!" said the young man, stoutly. He swung round to face the other, and his eyes sparkled with impatience. "Everybody avoids mention of him; they turn to something else when I speak his name—all but those abominable young men who offered him insult. That is what I should very much like to talk about!"

"I had thought it might not be necessary," replied Lord Julius. "At least, I had hoped you would pick up the information for yourself—a harmless little at a time, and guess the rest, and so spare everybody, yourself included. But that is precisely what you seem not to do; and I dare say I was wrong in not talking frankly with you at the start. But let me understand first: what do you know about your father?"

"Only that he was a soldier, a professional soldier. That I have told you," panted Christian.

"Yes, and a very notable soldier," responded the other. "He won the Victoria Cross in the Mutiny—the youngest man in all India to do so. That is for you to remember always—in your own mind—for your own pride and consolation."

"Ah, yes, always!" murmured the son.

"And in other services, too, after he left England," the elder man went on, "I have understood that he was a loyal and very valuable officer to those he fought for. This also is something for you to be proud of—but still inside your own mind! That it is necessary to remember—that you must keep it to yourself. Forgive my repeating the injunction."

"Go on!" said Christian.

"Well," Lord Julius began, speaking with more hesitation, "Ambrose as a soldier was magnificent, but you know enough from your books to know that splendid soldiers may easily be—how shall I say?—not so splendid in other walks of life. It is to be said for him that he was bare twenty-three —poor boy. It was in 1859; and, as misery would have it, I was in Syria, traveling with my wife. Perhaps if I had been in England, I could have done something. As it was, there was no one to help him; and of course it may be that he couldn't have been helped. It was a case of a young man returning to London, with honors and flattery enough to turn even an old head, and walking blindfold into the worst company in Europe. I have no intention of going into details. You must take my word for it that suddenly four or five young men of great families fled to the Continent; and that, without much publicity in the papers, there was a very miserable sort of scandal after their flight. Other names were mentioned —but I needn't go into that. It was to the interest of many influential people to hush the thing up, and to some extent they succeeded. After a while it became even possible for the others to come back to England —there are many ways of managing such

matters—but there was one of them who never returned."

Christian gazed into the old man's face with mute, piteous fixity of concentration.

"This one, of course," Lord Julius pursued, picking his words still more cautiously, and liking his task less than ever, "was your father. The way was smoothed for the rest to come back, but not for him—that is, at first. Later, when he could have returned, he would not. Ambrose had a stubborn and bitter temper. He was furious with his father, with his family—with all England. He would touch none of us. Why, I myself went to Sicily many years ago—it was as soon as I had got back from the East—and learned the facts, and found out what could be done; and I tried to see him, and bring him home with me, but he would not speak with me, or even remain under the same roof with me—and so I could do nothing. Or yes, there was one thing—that is to maintain some kind of watch over you—after his death, and that we did. My own idea was to have brought you over to England years ago—as soon as your mother died—but Emanuel thought otherwise."

He paused here in his narrative, for the

reason that his companion was obviously no longer listening to him.

Christian had moved a step or two away, and with a white, set face was looking off over the hill-tops. His profile showed brows knitted and lips being bitten, under the stress of an internal tempest. It seemed to the old man a long time that he stood thus, in dry-eyed, passionate battle with his own mind. Then, with a sudden, decisive gesture he spread out his hands and turned impulsively to Lord Julius.

"You are an old man, and a wise one, and you were my father's friend and you are my friend!" he said, with trembling earnestness. "I should be a fool not to pay heed to what you tell me. You advise that I do not mention my father more than is necessary. Eh bien, I take your advice. Without doubt it is right—just as it is right that I should speak less of my brother Salvator. I have remembered that since you warned me, and now I will remember this. But I should like"—he came forward as he spoke, still with extended hands, and looked with entreating earnestness up into the other's face—"I should like to have you understand that Salvator is my brother not any the less, and that I love and honor and have pride in my father more than before. This I keep in my own mind,

as you advise—but one thing I will do for every one to take note of. I will write my name always 'Tower.' "

The great-uncle put a big, comforting hand on his shoulder. "I should not dream of blaming you," he said, gently. "But there is a man to tell us luncheon is ready."

He nodded comprehension to the servant who had appeared at the opening in the hedge, and, still with his hand on Christian's shoulder, began to move in that direction.

"One other matter," said the young man in lowered tones and hurriedly—"from the hill above, awhile ago, I saw my grandfather—in his chair, on the balcony. You said just now that my father hated him—was furious with him. Did he behave cruelly to my father?"

"Oh, no-o," replied Julius, with an indefinite upward inflection on the deliberate negative. "Not cruelly."

"But unjustly?"

"Oh, no, not unjustly, either—if only because he never in his life possessed the dimmest inkling of what justice meant. The duke is my brother, and I know him much better than any one else living, and so I am free to speak frankly about him. He has been a duke nearly eighty years—which is, I believe, unprecedented—but he has

been an ass still longer than that." After a pause he added: "I am going to take you to him this afternoon."

Christian hung his head as they walked along, and framed in his depressed mind more than one further inquiry about this grandsire of his, who held so august a station, and yet had been dismissed so contemptuously, but they did not translate themselves into speech. Nor, later, during the luncheon, was this great personage more than indirectly alluded to.

The way to this luncheon had led through three or four large rooms, opening one upon the other by small doors, the immediate approaches to which were given the effect of passageways by means of screens. What these apartments were used for, or how the residents of the castle distinguished them apart in their own minds, Christian could not imagine. To his rapid and curious inspection, they seemed all alike—each with its bare, indifferently polished floor, its huge stone fireplace, its wainscoting, walls and ceiling of dark, umber-hued wood, and its scant store of furniture which only heightened the ruling impression of big empty spaces. An occasional portrait was dimly to be discerned up in the duskiness of the oak panels, but the light from the narrow and

small-paned windows was too faint to examine them by. More cheerless or apparently useless rooms the young man had never seen.

Lord Julius seemed to guess his thoughts. "This is all an old part—what might be called mid-Plantagenet," he explained, as they went along. "My father had these rooms pulled about a good deal, and done up according to Georgian standards, but it was time and money wasted. Even if big windows were cut through they would be too dark for comfort, to our notions. The men who made them, of course, cared nothing at all about daylight, at least inside a house. They spent as little time as possible under roofs, to begin with; they rose at daybreak and went to bed at dark. When they were forced to be under cover, they valued security above all things, and the fewer openings there were in the walls, the better they liked it. They did no reading whatever, but after they had gorged themselves with food, sat around the fire and drank as much as they could hold, and listened to the silly rubbish of their professional story-tellers and ballad-singers till they fell asleep. If it happened that they wanted to gamble instead, a handful of rush-lights or a torch on the wall was enough to see the dice by.

Really, what did they want more? And for that matter, what do most of their lineal descendants want more either? Light enough to enable them to tell a spade from a heart, and perhaps to decipher the label on a bottle now and then. Nothing more. The fashion of the day builds plate-glass windows round them, but it is truly a gross superfluity."

The room in which Lady Cressage and the luncheon-table awaited them was of a more hospitable aspect. A broad expanse of lawn, and of distant trees and sky-line fading away in the sunny autumn haze, made a luminous picture of the high embrasured window stretching almost from corner to corner across one side. By contrast with the other apartments, the light here was brilliant. Christian, with a little apologetic bow and gesture to the others, dallied before the half-dozen portraits on the walls, examined the modeling of the blackened oak panels about them, and lingered in admiring scrutiny of the great carved chimney-piece above the cavernous hearth, on which a fire of logs crackled pleasantly. This chimney-piece was fairly architectural in its dimensions. It was as full of detail, and seemed almost as big, as the west front of a church, and he tipped his head back to look up at its intricate, yet

flowing scheme of scrollwork, its heraldic symbolism used now for decoration, now to point the significance, as it were, of the central escutcheon—and all in old wood of so ripe a nut-brown color that one seemed to catch a fragrance exhaled from it.

"That is the best thing here," said Edith Cressage, moving over to stand beside him. "It came from Ludlow Castle. Those are the arms of the Mortimers. It *is* the Mortimers, isn't it?" She turned to Lord Julius for support. "I always confuse them with the De Lacys."

"Yes, the Mortimers," answered Julius, as servants entered, and they took their seats. "But almost every other family of the Marches is represented in the devices scattered about. You can see the arrows of the Egertons, the eagles of the Grandisons, and up above, the corbies or ravens of the Corbets, and so on. That was the period when the Marches ruled England, and their great families, all married and intermarried and bolstered up by the feudal structure, were like a nation by themselves. The Mortimers, you know," he added, turning to Christian, "became practically kings of England. At least they had their grandsons on the throne—but they couldn't hold it after they had got it. The day of these

parts was really over before Bosworth Field. The printing press and Protestantism finished the destruction of its nobility. Only a house here and there has survived among us. Some few of the old names are preserved, like flies in amber, over in Ireland, but I should not know where to look to-day for a De Lacy, or a Tregoz, or a west country Le Strange, let alone a Mortimer. I suppose, in fact, we have more of the Mortimer blood among us than there is anywhere else."

Christian, seated so that he faced the great armorial pageant spread as a background to the fair head of the lady, smiled wistfully at his companions, but said nothing. The words about his sharing the blood of kings were like some distant, soft music in his ears. He looked at the escutcheons and badges, and sought in a dreamy way to familiarize himself with the fact that they were a part of his own history—that the grandeur they told of was in truth his personal heritage.

There was some talk going on between the others—conversation which, for a time, he scarcely strove to follow. Lord Julius had begun by expressing his joy at the absence from luncheon of the physician whom circumstances kept on the premises,

and from this he drifted to an attack upon doctors as a class. He denounced them root and branch, as impostors and parasites, who darkened and embittered human life by fostering all the mean cowardices of small-brained people, in order that they might secure a dishonest livelihood by pretending to dispel the horrors their own low tricks had conjured up. The robust old gentleman developed these violent theories without heat or any trace of excitement, and even maintained a genial expression of countenance while he spoke. Lady Cressage seemed entertained, and even helped on the diatribe now and again with pertinent quips of her own. But Christian could see very little sense in such an assault upon a respectable profession, and his attention wandered willingly again to the splendid chimney-piece. He resolved to learn all there was to learn of the heraldry and local history embodied in this sumptuous decoration, without delay. But then, on every conceivable side there was so much to learn!

Suddenly he became aware that his thoughts had concentrated themselves on the extraordinary badness of the luncheon he was eating. Here at least was something Caermere could not teach him about—nor, for that matter, as it seemed, all Eng-

land either. Since his arrival in the country, he reflected, he had not encountered one even tolerable dish. Vegetables and fish half raw, meats tasteless and without sauce or seasoning, bread heavy and sour, coffee unrecognizable, the pastry a thing too ridiculous for words—so his indictment shaped itself. He felt it his duty to argue to himself that quite likely this graceless and repellent diet was the very thing which made the English such physical and temperamental masters of the world, but the effort left him sad. He made a resolution that if ever Caermere were his a certain white-capped Agostino, in Cannes, should be imported forthwith. Then he became conscious again of what was being said at the table.

"If you could only imagine," Lady Cressage was saying to Lord Julius, "what a boon your coming has been! I had positively almost forgotten what intelligent conversation was like. It seems ages since I last heard ten consecutive words strung together on a thought of any description. Let me see—it was June when you were last down, with Sir Benjamin Alstead; he has been here once since—but in your absence he put on such a pompous 'eminent-physician' manner that really I oughtn't to count

him at all—and with that exception, from June to October, civilization has left poor me entirely out of its reckoning. But perhaps''—they had risen now, and there was a certain new frankness, almost confidence of appeal in her glance into his face—''perhaps, as matters have turned, you will come oftener henceforth?''

Lord Julius nodded. ''It is quite likely,'' he said, and stretched forth his hand significantly to Christian's shoulder. ''But you were going to show him the house—and I suppose I may come along too. There is half an hour before we go to my brother—and our train does not leave Clune till nearly six.''

''You are not going to-day! and he too?'' she exclaimed, hurriedly.

The old man nodded again. ''We are expected at Emanuel's to-night,'' he answered. Then, as Christian had moved toward the window and seemed beyond hearing, he added, in a smiling aside, ''There is one reason for dragging him away that is comical enough. It wouldn't do for him to dine at Caermere in morning clothes, and so far as I can see he has no others.''

''He could be too tired to dine,'' she suggested, quickly, in a confidential murmur. ''Or, for that matter, there is a room full of

Porlock's things—I suppose—I suppose poor Cressage's—would be too big for him. Oh, it's too dreadful to have him whisked off like this! Can't you send a telegram instead?"

Her tone was as frank as her speech—and on the instant her glance at his face made keen inquiry whether it had not been too frank.

He smiled in a tolerant, almost amused way. "Oh, he will return all in good time," he assured her, gently enough. "Caermere will see plenty of him, later on."

"Yes, but who can tell where I shall be then?" The necessity for speaking in an undertone gave her words an added intensity of feeling. "And it isn't only him—I had hoped you would be stopping some days at least—for I wanted to speak with you about this very thing. My position here—the uncertainty of everything—is intolerable to bear." She lifted her head, and turned her direct gaze into his eyes. "If only you liked me a little better, I could discuss the matter more freely with you."

"Humbug!" replied Lord Julius, with a geniality which was at least superficially reassuring. "You shouldn't say such things, much less think them. I can understand your impatience—but it will be pos-

sible to straighten out affairs very soon now. I don't think you will be found to have suffered by the delay."

"Oh, that is all right," she answered, almost pettishly. "Everybody assures me of the most magnanimous intentions—but in the meantime"—she checked herself, tossed her head in resentment, apparently, at the tears which had started to her eyes, and forced herself to smile—"in the meantime, you must forgive my tantrums. It is so depressing here—all alone—or worse than alone! I'm really no longer fit to receive anybody. But now"—she raised her voice in an eager simulation of gaiety—"shall the personally conducted tour begin?"

Caermere had been inaccessible to so many generations of sightseers that no formula for its exhibition remained. The party seemed to Christian to wander at haphazard through an interminable succession of rooms, many of them small, some of them what he could only think of as over-large, but all insufficiently lighted, and all suggesting in their meager appointments and somber dejection of aspect a stage of existence well along on the downward path to ruin. He had only to look about him to perceive why Caermere had long ago been

removed from the list of England's show-places. His companions between them kept his attention busy with comments upon the history and purpose of the apartments they passed through, but beyond a general sense of futile and rather shabby immensity he gained very little from the inspection. The mood to postpone comprehension of what he was seeing to another and a more convenient time was upon him, and he almost willfully yielded to it.

Once, when impulse prompted him to climb a little ladder-like staircase, and push open a door from which the black dust fell in a shower, and he discerned in the gloom of the attic chamber piles of armor and ancient weapons, a thrill of fleeting excitement ran through his veins.

"They say that Prince Llewelyn's armor is there," called up Lord Julius from the landing below. "Some day we will have it all out, and cleaned and furbished up. But don't go in now! You'll get covered with dirt. I used to venture in there and rummage about once in a while when I was a boy," he added as Christian came down. "But even then one came out black as a sweep."

There were fine broad stretches of rugged landscape to be seen here and there from

narrow casements in the older, higher parts they were now traversing, and occasionally Christian was able to interest himself as well in details of primitive, half-obliterated ornamentation over arches and doorways of early periods, but he was none the less almost glad when they came out at last into a spacious upper hallway, and halted in tacit token that the journey was at an end.

"Now I will leave you," said the lady, with lifted skirt and a foot poised tentatively over the first step of the broad descending stairs. "I shall have tea in the conservatory when you come down."

Christian felt that something must be said. "It has all been very wonderful to me," he assured her. "I am afraid I did not seem very appreciative—but that is because the place is too huge, too vast, to be understood quite at once. And I am so new to it all—you will understand what I mean. But I thank you very much."

She smiled brightly on him and nodded to them both, and passed down the stairway. Christian was all at once conscious, as his eyes followed her, that there was a novel quickening or fluttering of his heart's action. For a brief second, the sensation somehow linked itself in his thoughts with the tall, graceful figure receding from him, and he

bent forward to grasp more fully the picture she made, moving sedately along, with a hand like a lily on the wide black rail. Then he suddenly became aware that this was an error, and that he was trembling instead because the moment for confronting his grandfather had come.

Lord Julius, indeed, had already opened a massive mahogany door at the right of the stairs, and signaled to him now to follow.

CHAPTER VII

What Christian first perceived about the duke's apartments was that they had an odor quite peculiar to themselves. The series of small and badly lighted anterooms through which he followed Lord Julius—rooms with pallet-beds, clothes hung against the walls, and other somewhat squalid signs of domestic occupation—were full of this curiously distinctive smell. It was not so obvious in the larger and better-lighted chamber beyond, which the doctor in residence had converted to his own uses, and where he sat now reading a book, merely rising momentarily to bow as they passed. But in the next room—the big sleeping apartment, with its faded pretensions of stateliness of appointment, and its huge, high-posted bed, canopied by old curtains embroidered with heraldic devices in tarnished gilt threads—the odor was more powerful than ever, despite the fact that a broad window-door was open upon the balcony beyond. The young man's keen sense was baffled by this pervasive scent—compounded as it seemed

to be of all the ancient castle's mustiness, of sharp medicinal vapors and of something else at once familiar and unknown. He sniffed inquiringly at it, as they neared the window, and apparently Lord Julius heard him, for he remarked over his shoulder:

"It is the dogs that you smell. They've practically removed the kennel up here."

On the stone floor of the balcony outside there were to be seen, indeed, some dozen old hounds, for the most part lying sleepily in the sunshine, with their heads pointed toward a large, half-covered reclining chair placed near the balustrade, and occasionally opening a drowsy eye to regard its occupant. There were a few dogs of other kinds as well, Christian noted upon a second glance, and one of these, a bulky black creature with a broad snout and hair curled tight like astrakhan fur, sat close to the chair and was thrusting its muzzle against a hand at its side.

This hand was what Christian saw first of his grandfather—an immense limp hand, with thick fingers twisted and misshapen, and skin of an almost greenish pallor. The dog's nose, thrust under it, moved this inert hand about, and the young man felt himself thrill unpleasantly, for some reason, at the spectacle.

At the further end of the balcony two men in livery lounged against the wall, but upon a signal from Lord Julius they went in. The latter, threading his way among the hounds, led Christian round to the side of the chair.

"This is Ambrose's boy," he said, bending a little and raising his voice. "He is Christian, too."

Upon the chair was stretched, in a half-sitting posture, the gigantic frame of a very old man. The grandson looked upon him in silence for a long time, his mind confused with many impressions. The vast shoulders and high, bullet-like head, propped up by pillows in the partial shadow of the hood, seemed vaguely to recall the vision his baby-memory had preserved of his own father. But in detail there was no resemblance. Or yes, there were resemblances, but they were blurred almost beyond recognition by the rough touch of time. The face, with its big, harsh features and bushing brows, and its frame of stiff white whiskers under the jaws and chin, had something in it which for an instant the young man seemed to identify; then the unnatural effect of its uniform yellow-clay color drove all thoughts of its human relationships from his mind, and he saw nothing but a meaningless mask. It

was as devoid of significance, indeed, as if it had been in a coffin. The eyes were open and they seemed to be fixed upon the distant rolling prospect of hills and forest, but whether they were seeing anything, Christian could not imagine. They certainly had not been turned to include him in their survey. The livid right hand, swaying as the black dog pushed it with its nose, was the only thing about the duke that moved.

"He does not know I am here," said Christian, at last. He spoke instinctively, with the ceremonious affectation of awe which one puts on in the presence of death. His grandfather hardly impressed him as being alive and still less made any appeal to his sense of kinship. He had expected to be overwhelmed with emotion at the meeting, but he found himself barely interested. His wandering glance chanced to take note of some of the dogs' faces about the chair. They were all alertly watching him, and the profoundly wise look in their eyes caught his attention. No doubt they were dreadful fools, if the truth could be known, but the suggestion of cultured sagacity in their gaze was extraordinary. He looked back again at his grandfather, and tried to say to himself that he was a great noble, the head of an ancient and proud line, and the actual

father of *his* father—but the effort failed to spur his fancy. He turned to Lord Julius and lifted his brows in wearied interrogation.

"Move round in front of him," counseled the other. "Get yourself in the range of his eyes."

Christian obeyed, and, flushing a little with self-consciousness, strove to intercept the aged man's gaze. There was no change upon the ashen face under the hood to tell him whether he had succeeded or not. The impulse to grimace, to wave his arms about, to compel attention by any wild and violent device, forced him to smile in the midst of his perplexed constraint. He stared for a few moments longer at the gaunt, immovable figure—then shrugged his shoulders, and, stepping over a dog or two, made bold to rejoin Lord Julius.

"I do not see that it is of any use," he said, with annoyance. "If you wish to go, I am quite ready."

Lord Julius lifted his brows in turn, and looked at his grand-nephew with curiosity. "I said nothing about going, that I recall," he began, with an effect of reproof in his tone. But then he seemed to think better of it, and gave an abrupt little laugh. "It isn't very invigorating, I'm bound to admit,"

he confessed, cheerfully enough. "Wait a moment, and I'll stir him up a bit."

He bent forward again, with his head at the edge of the hood, and shouted into it: "If you want to see Ambrose's boy, here he is! If you don't want to see him, say so, and waste no more of our time!"

To Christian's surprise, the duke took instant cognizance of this remark. His large face brightened, or at least altered its aspect, into something like animation; his eyes emerged from their cover of lethargy, and looked alive.

"My back is very bad to-day," he remarked, in a voice which, though it bore the querulous note of the invalid, was unexpectedly robust in volume. "And I cannot make out whether the numbness is passing down below my knee or not."

Lord Julius nodded, as if confirming to himself some previous suspicion. "I thought as much," he commented in an aside to the young man. "It's merely his endearing little way. Have patience, and we'll draw the badger yet."

He bawled once more into the hood, with an added peremptoriness of tone: "I explained it all to you, hours ago, and I'm sure you understand it perfectly. Christian naturally wished to pay his respects to you,

but if your back is too bad, why, there's no more to be said—and we'll be off. Good-bye to you!"

"Did I know his mother? Who was his mother? I have no recollection of her." The duke spoke peevishly, twitching his sunken lips in what was plainly an effort to pout them. Christian noted with curiosity that as he surrendered himself to such mental exertion as the talk demanded, the aged man's face grew disagreeably senile in effect. An infinity of gossamer-like wrinkles showed themselves now, covering the entire countenance in a minute network.

"No, you didn't know his mother!" replied Lord Julius, with significant curtness. "It is more to the point that you should know *him*, since he is to be your successor. Look at him—and say something to him!"

The duke managed to testify on his stiffened lineaments the reluctance with which he did what he was told, but he shifted his eyes in a sidelong fashion to take a brief survey of the young man. "Cressage could have given you five stone ten," he said to him, brusquely, and turned his eyes away.

Christian cast a look of bewildered inquiry up at Lord Julius, but encountered only a smile of contemptuous amusement. He summoned the courage to declare, in a voice

which he hoped was loud enough: "I am glad to hear, sir, that this is one of your good days. I hope you will have many more of them!"

Of this assurance His Grace seemingly took no note. After a short pause he began speaking again. "There's a dog up here," he said, with the gravity befitting a subject to which he had given much thought, "that I'm sure falls asleep, and yelps in her dreams, and disturbs me most damnably, and I believe it's that old bitch Peggy, and when I mention it the fellows swear that she's been taken away, but I suspect that she hasn't."

"We will look to it," put in Lord Julius perfunctorily. He added, upon an afterthought, "Did the guns annoy you, this forenoon?"

The duke's thoughts were upon something else. He turned his eyes again, and apparently spoke to Christian. "A good hearty cut across the face with a whip," he said, with kindling energy, "is what'd teach swine like Griffiths their place—and then let 'em summons you and be damned. A farmer who puts up barbed-wire—no gentleman would listen to his evidence for a minute. Treat them like the vermin they are—and they'll understand that. Cressage had

the proper trick with them—a kick in the stomach first and reasons afterward. That's the only way this country can be hunted. When I got to riding over eighteen stone, and couldn't take anything, that ruffian Griffiths screwed up his gates and sent me round the turnpike like a damned peddler, and Ambrose—it was Ambrose, wasn't it?—or am I thinking of Cressage? But they weren't together—here, Julius! It was you who were speaking of Ambrose! What about him? By God, I wish he had my back!"

Lord Julius, with the smile in his beard hardening toward scorn, took Christian by the arm. "I think you've had enough grandfather to go on with," he said, quietly. "Never mind making your adieux. They would be quite wasted on him."

Without further words, they turned and moved away through the dogs to the window, and so into the house. The doctor, still at his book, rose once more upon their approach, and this time Lord Julius halted to speak with him.

"His Grace seems to ramble in his mind a good deal more than he did before luncheon. Do you see a change in this respect—say week by week?"

"It is not observable in gradations, Lord

Julius," answered the physician, a stout, sandy young man, who assumed his air of deference with considerable awkwardness; "sometimes he recovers a very decided lucidity after what had seemed to be a prolonged lapse in the other direction. But on the whole I should say there was a perceptible—well, loss of faculty. He knows the dogs, however, quite as well as ever—distinguishes them apparently by touch, remembers all their names, and recalls anecdotes about them, and, very often, about their mothers too. Fletcher tells me His Grace hasn't once miscalled a hound."

"They make an abominable atmosphere up here," commented the other.

The doctor smiled lugubriously. "I can't deny that, Lord Julius," he replied, "but all the same they are the most important part of the treatment. If we took them away, His Grace would die within the week."

"Unhappy dogs!" mused Lord Julius, partly to himself, and walked on. It was not until they were half-way down the big staircase that Christian felt impelled to speak.

"I should much like to know," he began, with diffident eagerness—"you have already spoken so plainly about my grandfather—the question will not seem rude to him, I

hope—but when he was well, before the paralysis, was he in any respect like what he is now?"

"I should say," answered Lord Julius, in a reflective way, "that he is at present rather less objectionable than formerly. One can make the excuse of illness for him now—and that covers a multitude of sins. But when he was in health—and he had the superb—what shall I say?—riotous health of a whale—he was very hard to bear. You have seen him and you have observed his mental and moral elevation. He remembers his dogs more distinctly than he does his children. In the Almanach de Gotha he is classed among princes, but what he dwells upon most fondly among his public duties is the kicking of tenant-farmers in the stomach when they try to save their crops from being ruined by the hunt. I may tell you, I was in two minds about taking you to him at all, and now I think I regret having done so."

"No-o," said Christian, thoughtfully. "It is better as it is. I am glad to have seen him, and to have you tell me about him, frankly, as you have done. It all helps me to understand the position—and it seems that there is a great deal that needs to be understood. I can see already that there is

strange blood in the Torrs." He paused on the bottom step as he spoke, and turned to his companion with a wistful smile. "There is an even bolder question I should like to ask—how does it happen that *you* are so different? How do you account for yourself?"

Lord Julius laughed. "Oh, that is a long story," he said, "but I can put it into a word for you. I was made by my wife. I married a woman so noble and clever and wise and strong that I couldn't help becoming a decent sort of fellow in spite of myself. But I am going to talk to you about all that, later on. It is better worth talking about than anything else under the sun. Oh—Barlow, please!"

The old butler had passed from one door to another in the hall, and turned now as he was called, with a hand behind him upon the knob. Lord Julius, approaching, exchanged some words with him upon the subject of his afternoon's plans.

Christian, watching this venerable servant with curiosity, as a type novel to his experience, discovered suddenly that his scrutiny was being returned. Barlow, while listening attentively and with decorously slow nods of comprehension to what was being said to him, had his eyes fixed aslant, beyond

his interlocutor's shoulder, upon the young stranger. Christian encountered this gaze, and saw it waver and flutter aside, as from force of polite habit, and then creep back again. This happened more than once, and Christian began to feel that it had some meaning. He observed that the butler inclined his head at last and whispered something—his pale, wan old face showed it to be an inquiry—into the other's ear. The action explained itself so perfectly that Christian was in no way surprised to see Lord Julius turn smilingly, and nod toward himself.

"Yes, he is Ambrose's son," he said. "He has come to take his place. I know you for one won't be sorry—eh, Barlow?"

It was clear to the young man's perceptions that Lord Julius spoke as to one who was a friend as well as a servant. The note of patriarchal kindness in the tone appealed gratefully to him, and the affectionate mention of his father's name was sweet in his ears. A strange thrill of emotion, a kind of aimless yet profound yearning, possessed him as he moved forward. On the instant he realized that this was how he had expected to feel in the presence of his grandfather. The fact that the tenderness within him was appealed to instead by this gentle,

sad-eyed old family dependant seemed to him to have something beautiful and very touching in it. Tears came into his eyes.

"You remember my father, then," he said, and the breaking of his voice carried him into the heart of this sudden new mood of self-abandonment. "You would have known him as a little child—yes?—and you —you—" he paused, to dash away the tears with his hand, and strive to regain some control over his facial muscles—"you will have in your memory the good things about him —the boyish, pleasant things—and you loved him for them, did you not?"

Old Barlow, trembling greatly, and with a faint flush upon his white cheeks, stared confusedly at the young man as he advanced. "I held him on his first pony, sir," he stammered forth, and then shook his head in token that he could utter no more. His glistening eyes said the rest.

Christian flung his arms round the surprised old man's neck, and kissed him on both cheeks, and then, with head bowed upon his shoulder, sobbed aloud.

PART II

CHAPTER VIII

The music of a spirited and tireless band of robins helped Christian to wake next morning. The character of their cheerful racket defined itself very slowly to his drowsy consciousness. He lay for a long time with closed eyes, listening to it, and letting his mind drift quite at random among the thoughts which it suggested. He knew they were robins because his hostess had said he would hear them; he lazily pictured to himself the tiny red-breasts gathered in the shrubbery outside, in obedience to some mysterious signal of hers, and singing to order thus briskly and unwearyingly to make good her promise.

In what gay, high spirits the little fellow sang! The sun must be shining, to account for so much happiness. He accepted the idea with a sense of profound pleasure, and appropriated it to his own wonderful case.

For him, it was as if happiness had never existed before.

"'Wilt thou have music? Hark! Apollo plays,
And twenty cagéd nightingales do sing.'"

He murmured the lines in indolent reverie, then opened his eyes, and smiled to think where he was, and what he had become a part of. Lifting himself on his elbow, he looked about him. The beauties of the apartment had not been lost upon him the previous evening. He had carried them with him in vague processional magnificence on his devious march through dreamland; he surveyed them again now in the morning light, rising after a while to pull aside the curtains, and bring in the full sunshine.

The room was, he said over and over to himself, the most exquisite thing he had ever seen. The ruling color was of some blue which could almost be thought a green, and which embraced as complementary decoration many shades of ocher and soft yellowish browns in woodwork, and in the thick, fleecy rugs underfoot. Around the four sides, at the level of his eyes, ran a continuous band of portraits—the English drawings of Holbein reproduced in the dominant tint of the room, set solidly into the wall, and separated from one another only by thin

strips of the same tawny oak which framed them at top and bottom. The hooded, high-bosomed ladies, the cavaliers in hats and plumes and pointed beards, the smooth-faced, shrewd-eyed prelates and statesmen in their caps and fur, all knew him this morning for one of their own, as he went along, still in his nightshirt, and inspected them afresh. They appeared to greet him, and he beamed at them in response.

A dim impression of the earlier morning, which had seemed a shadowy passing phase of his dreams, revealed itself now to him as a substantial fact. Some one *had* been in the room, moving noiselessly about, and had spread forth for his use a great variety of articles of clothing and of the toilet, most of which he beheld for the first time. Overnight, his cousin Emanuel's insistence upon his regarding everything in the house as his own for the time being, had had no definite significance to his mind. He looked now through the array of silks and fine cloths, of trinkets in ivory and silver and polished metals, and began dressing himself with a long sigh of delight.

Recollections of the leave-taking at Caermere straggled into his thoughts as he pursued the task. He had seen Lady Cressage again in the conservatory, where she

wore another dress, and had her beautiful hair carefully arranged as if in his honor, and poured out tea for him and Lord Julius in wonderful little cups which his great-grandfather, a sailor, had brought from China. Of her conversation he recalled little, and still less of the talk of the other lady, the actress-person, Mrs. Edward, who had joined the party, but whose composed pretty face had been too obviously a mask for anguish not to dampen everybody's spirits. He wondered now, as he plied his razor on the strap, what had become of her husband, and of that poor-spirited brother of his. Had they joined the pheasant-shooters, after their interview with him? The temptation to fire upon themselves instead of the birds must have sorely beset them.

But it was pleasanter to begin the retrospect some hours later, when the rough country of the Marches, and even Bristol, had been left behind. Lord Julius had explained to him then, as darkness settled upon the low, pasture-land levels they were swinging along past, that Somerset was also a county of the Torrs; two of their three titles were derived from it, indeed, and Somerset marriages had brought into the family, in the days following the downfall of the monasteries, some of the most important

of its estates. If the dukes had turned their backs on Caermere two centuries ago, and made their principal seat here in this gentler and more equable land, perhaps the family history might have been different. Christian had absorbed the spirit rather than the letter of his companion's remarks. English counties were all one to him, but intuitively he had felt that he was getting into a kindlier and more congenial atmosphere. Although it was a black night, he had stared a good deal at the window, trying to discern some tokens of this change in the dimly lighted, empty stations they glided through, or paused reluctantly in.

When they had finally quitted the train at Bridgewater, and had got under way inside the carriage waiting for them there, Christian had asked whether it was not true that the railway servants here were more courteously obliging than they had been in other parts.

Lord Julius had lightly remarked that it might be so; very likely, however, it was some indirect effect of the general psychical change the family underwent in shifting its territorial base. Then he had gone on more gravely, alluding for the first time to the episode of the butler.

"You must be prepared to find everything

very different, here," he had said. "There is such a thing as having too much past—especially when it is of the wrong sort. Caermere is as tenacious of its memories as a prison—and they are as unpleasant. It forces upon you its air of never forgetting a single one of its miseries and injuries—and you feel that it cannot remember any compensating joys. I could see how the effect of it got into your blood, and broke your nerve. Under ordinary circumstances men do not kiss their butlers, or even sob on their bosoms. But I understood perfectly how old Barlow appealed to you. As you beheld him he might have stood as model for a statue of the Family Grief, choking down its yearning to wail over the generations gone to the bad. It was all right, what you did. For that matter, I was precious near raising a howl of lamentation myself. One is always alternating between tears and curses in that criminal old coal-mine of a castle. But now you are over a hundred miles away from it all—and if it was a thousand the difference couldn't be greater. You will find nothing whatever to cry about down here. Nobody has any bad dreams. There isn't a cupboard that ever sheltered a skeleton even overnight. In these parts, remarkable as it may seem, the Torrs are

actually regarded with admiration—quite the salt of the earth—a trifle eccentric, perhaps, but splendid landlords, capable organizers, uncommonly good masters—and above all, happy people who insist that everybody about them shall be happy too. It was important to show you the other side first—at least that was what we decided upon, but you are done with that now—and we'll give you something to take the taste out of your mouth."

Christian recalled these assurances, now, with a delicious sense of being already enfolded and upheld by the processes of their fulfillment. The details of his reception at the broad, hospitably lighted door of Emanuel's house crowded in upon his memory, and merged themselves with other recollections of the later evening hours—the supper, the long, calm, sweetly intimate talk before the fire, the honest, wise, frankly affectionate faces into which he had looked to say "good-night"—it almost overwhelmed him with its weight of unimagined happiness. He had hardly guessed before what other men might mean when they gave a loving sound to the word "home." Yet now the doors of such a home as he could never have dreamed of had opened to him—to him, the homeless, lonely one! and he was nestled

securely in the warm heart of its welcome. He could have groaned aloud under the burden of his rapture at the thought.

At last he went downstairs, his misgivings about the hour not quite allayed by recollection of the parting injunction to sleep his fill and get up when he liked. There were beautiful things to note and linger over on every side as he made his way—pictures and armor and wonderful inlaid work and tapestries, all subordinating themselves with distinguished good breeding to the fact that they were in a home and not a museum—but he moved along in rather conscience-stricken haste toward the part of the house which had seemed to him the previous night to be the center of domestic life. He formed a sudden resolution, as he explored the lower hallway, that when he got some money his first purchase should be of a watch.

After looking into a couple of rooms which were clearly not what he sought, Christian opened the right door, and confronted a breakfast-table, shining in its snowy attractiveness midway between a window full of sunlight and a brightly tiled chimney-place, with a fire on the hearth. There was no one in the room, and he stood for some minutes looking about him, liking very much the fresh, light-hued cheerfulness of every-

thing, but still wishing that some one would come to pour his coffee. By degrees, he assimilated the idea that the ingredients of breakfast were all here to hand. There were dishes beside the fire, and this was apparently the coffee-pot on the table—a covered urn, with a thin spirit-flame trembling beneath it. He had reached the point of deciding to help himself—or should he ring the bell instead?—when the door opened and the lady of the house came bustling in.

Mrs. Emanuel, as he styled her in his thoughts, looked the very spirit of breakfast—buoyant, gay-hearted and full of the zest of life. Last night, to the young man's diffident though strenuous inspection, she had seemed the embodiment of tender hospitality in general. Though his glances were more confident now, in the brilliant morning light, she still gave the impression of personifying the influences which she made felt about her, rather than exhibiting a specific personal image. She was not tall, nor yet short; her face pleased the eye without suggesting prettiness; she had the dark, clear skin and rounded substance of figure which the mind associates with sedate movements and even languor, but she herself moved, thought, spoke with alert vivacity. Above all things, a mellow motherliness in

her had struck the forlorn youth the previous evening. Now it seemed much more like the sweet playfulness of a fond elder sister.

"You took me at my word; that's right," she said to him, as they shook hands. "I was afraid the man might disturb you, or give you the idea you were expected to get up. And do you feel perfectly rested now? A day or two more will do it, at all events. If I'd known how they were dragging you about, by night and by day! But your Uncle Julius has no knowledge of even the meaning of the word fatigue. Sit here, won't you—and now here's bacon for you, and here's fish taken this very morning, and eggs I'll ring for to be done as you like them, and how much sugar to your coffee? You mustn't think this has been boiling ever since morning. It was made when you were heard moving about in your room."

"I should be so sorry to have kept anybody waiting," he began, in shy comment upon the discovery that he was eating alone.

She laughed at him with cordial frankness. "Waiting?" she echoed merrily. "Why, it's about three o'clock. Lord Julius is nearly in London by this time, and the rest of us have not only breakfasted, but lunched."

"Lord Julius gone?" he asked with wide-open eyes.

She nodded, and raised a reassuring hand. "It's nothing but business. Telegrams came early this morning which took him away by the first train. He would have gone later in the day in any case. He left the most fatherly adieux for you—and of course you'll be seeing him soon in London."

Christian was puzzled. "But this is his home here, is it not?" he asked.

"Not at all—more's the pity," she replied. "We wish for nothing so much as that he might make it so—but he elects instead to be the slave of the family, and to work like a bank-clerk in Brighton instead of cutting himself free and living his own life like the rest of us, in God's fresh air. But he comes often to us—whenever the rural mood seizes him." She seemed to comprehend the doubtful expression on the youth's face, for she added smilingly: "And you mustn't be frightened to be left alone with us. You're as much our blood as you are his—and—"

"Oh, don't think that!" he pleaded impulsively. "I was never so glad to be anywhere in my life as I am to be here."

Her gray eyes regarded him with kindly softness. He saw that they were only in

part gray eyes—that they were both blues and browns in their beautiful coloring, and that the outer edge of the iris deepened in tint almost to the black of the splendid lashes. He returned her look, and held it with a tentative smile, that he might the longer observe the remarkable eyes. All at once it flashed upon him that there was a resemblance.

"Your eyes are like my mother's," he said, as if in defensive explanation of his scrutiny.

"Tell me about your mother," she rejoined, putting her arms on the table and resting her chin upon a finger. "I do not think I ever heard her name."

"It was Coppinger—Mary Coppinger. I never saw the name anywhere else." He added hesitatingly: "My brother told me that her father was a soldier—an officer—who became in his old age very poor, and was at last a gardener for some rich man at Malta, and my mother gave lessons as a governess to support herself, and it was there she met my father."

The lady seemed most interested in the name. "Coppinger, is it!" she exclaimed, nodding her head at him. "No wonder my heart warmed at the sight of you. Why, now, to look at you—of course you're County

Cork. You're our slender dark type to perfection."

"I am afraid I do not understand," he murmured.

"Why, she could not have that name and be anything but a County Cork woman. Who ever heard of a Coppinger anywhere else? Only it is pronounced with a soft 'g,' not hard, as you speak it. I wonder—but that can wait; her father will be easily enough traced. And so you are an Irishman, too!"

Christian looked abashed at the confusing suggestion. "I think I am all English," he said vaguely.

She laughed again. "Are you turning your back on us? Did you not know it? I also am Irish. No doubt I am some sort of cousin of yours on my own account, as well as on Emanuel's. There are Coppingers in my own family, and in most of those that we have intermarried with. Your mother was a Protestant, of course."

He shook his head apprehensively, as if fearful that his answer must give pain. "No, she went to mass like other people, and I was sent to the Brothers of the Christian School. But she was not in any degree a *dévotée*, and for that matter," he added in a more confident tone, "I myself am still less *dévot*."

"Ah!" was her only comment, and he quite failed to gather from it any clue to her sentiments on the subject. "Well," she began again, "I'll not put you through any more of your catechism now. Are you finished? Then come with me and we will find Emanuel, and incidentally you will see the place—or portions of it. It will take you a long time to see it all. Do you want to smoke? Put some of these cigars in your pocket—or here are cigarettes if you prefer them. Oh, we smoke everywhere. There is nothing on earth that we want to do that we don't do—and there's nothing we don't want to do that any mortal power can make us do. There you have the sum of our philosophy."

He had followed her into the hallway, where the doors were open wide to the mellow autumn afternoon. He put on the soft shapeless hat she gave him from a collection on the antlers, and was inspired to select a stick for himself out of the big standful at the door.

"Now I shall walk about," he said, gaily, "quite as if I had never been out of England in my life. Is your husband—perhaps—shooting?"

She seemed always to laugh at him. Her visible merriment at his question dashed his

spirits for an instant. Then he saw how genial and honest was her mirth, and smiled himself in spontaneous sympathy with it.

"Don't dream of suggesting it to him!" she adjured the young man, with mock solemnity. "He has a horror of the idea of killing living creatures. He does not even fish for sport—though I confess I hardly follow him to that length. And don't speak of him in that roundabout way, but call him Emanuel, and call me Kathleen or Kit—whichever comes easiest. Merely because Thom's directory swears we're forty years old, we're not to be made venerable people by you. All happy folk belong to the same generation, no matter when they were born—and—but here is Emanuel now.

"I have been telling Christian," she continued, addressing her husband as he paused at the foot of the steps, "that he is to be happy here, even in spite of himself."

Emanuel shook hands with his cousin, and nodded pleased approval of his wife's remark. His smile, however, was of a fleeting sort. "Nothing has come of the Œnothera experiments," he announced to her in a serious tone. "I'm afraid we must give up the idea of the yellow fuchsia."

CHAPTER IX

Emanuel Torr, at the age of forty, was felt by those who knew and loved him almost to have justified the very highest of the high hopes which his youth had encouraged. This intimate circle of appreciation was rendered a small one by the circumstances of his temperament and choice of career; but beyond this his name was familiar to many who had never seen him, or who remembered him at best as a stripling, yet who habitually thought and spoke of him as an example and model to his generation.

At Oxford, twenty years before, he had attracted attention of a sort rather peculiar to himself. Those who took note of him saw foreshadowed the promise, not so much of great achievements as of the development and consolidation of a great influence. He was not specially distinguished in his work at the University, and he made no mark at the Union, where there happened at the time to be glittering a quite exceptional galaxy of future front bench men, judges and bishops. In Emanuel's case, the interest he aroused was perhaps more sentimental

than intellectual. His mind was seen to be of a fine order, but his character was even more attractive to the observant eye. The facts that he was half Jewish in blood, and that in time he would be the possessor of enormous wealth, no doubt lent an added suggestion of romance to the picture of delicate, somewhat coldly modeled features, of ivory skin and serious, musing dark eyes, and of a rare smile of wonderful sweetness, which Oxford men of the mid-seventies still associate with his name. It was in the days when Disraeli's remarkable individuality was a part of England's current history, and when the English imagination, in part from the stimulus of this fact, dwelt upon the possibilities of a new Semitic wave of inspiration and ethical impetus. The dreams, the aspirations, the mysterious "perhaps" of Daniel Deronda were in men's minds, and Johannesburg had not been so much as heard of.

What the University recognized in the youth standing upon the threshold of manhood, had been an article of faith within his home since his childhood. It is as well to recount at this place the brief story of that home.

At the age of twenty-five Lord Julius Torr, engaged in the listless pursuit of that least

elusive of careers, called diplomacy, found himself at The Hague, and yawned his way about its brightly scrubbed solitudes for some months, until, upon the eve of his resolve to have done with the whole business, and buy a commission in a line regiment, he encountered a young woman who profoundly altered all his plans in life. It was by the merest and unlikeliest of accidents that he came to know the Ascarels, father and daughter, and at the outset his condescension had seemed to him to be involved as well. They were of an old family in the Netherlands, Jewish in race but now for some generations estranged from the synagogue, and reputed to be extraordinarily wealthy. It was said of them too that they were sternly exclusive, but to the brother of an English duke this had not appeared to possess much meaning. He had previously been of some official service to the father, in a matter wherein Dutch and English interests touched each other at Sumatra; from this he came to meet the daughter. He had been told by the proud father that she was of the blood of the immortal Spinoza, and had been so little impressed that he had not gone to the trouble of finding out who Spinoza was.

The marriage of young Torr, of the

Foreign Office, to some Dutch-Jewish heiress a half-year later, received only a trifle more notice in England than did the news of his retirement from his country's diplomatic service. The duke had already four sons, and the brother, when it seemed that he intended to live abroad, was not at all missed. Nearly fifteen years elapsed before a mature Lord Julius reappeared in England—a Lord Julius whom scarcely any one found recognizable. He bore small visible relation to the aimless and indolent young attaché whom people, by an effort of memory, were able to recall; still less did he resemble anything else that the Torr family, within recollection, had produced. He took a big old house in Russell Square, and in time it became understood that very learned and intellectual people paid pilgrimages thither to sit at the feet of Lady Julius, and learn of her. Smart London rarely saw this Lady Julius save at a distance—in her carriage or at the opera. The impression it preserved of her was of a short, swarthy woman, increasingly stout as years went on, who peered with near-sighted earnestness through a large pince-nez of unusual form. On her side, it seemed doubtful if she had formed even so succinct an impression as this of smart London. She was content

with Bloomsbury to the end of her days; and made no effort whatever to establish relations with the West End. Indeed, tales came to be told of the effectual resistance she offered, in later years, to amiable interested advances from that quarter. It grew to be believed that she had made an eccentric will, and would leave untold millions to Atheist charities. The rumor that she was among the most highly cultivated women of her time, and that the most illustrious scientists and thinkers would quit the society of kings to travel post-haste across Europe at her bidding, did not, it must regretfully be added, seem incompatible with this theory about a crazy will. Finally, when she died in 1885, something was printed by the papers about her philanthropy, and much was said in private speculation about her disposition of her vast fortune, but it did not come out that any will whatever was proved, and London ceased to think of the matter.

The outer world had in truth been wrong from the beginning. Lady Julius was not a deeply learned woman, and the limited circle of friends she gathered about her contained hardly one distinguished figure, in the popular use of the phrase; her opinions were not notably advanced or unconventional; she did not shun society upon philo-

sophic principles, but merely because it failed to attract a nature at once shy and practical; so far from being rich in her own right, she had insisted many years before her death upon transferring every penny of her fortune to her husband.

Inside her own household, this dark, stout little woman with the eye-glasses was revered as a kind of angel. She was plain-faced almost to ugliness in the eyes of strangers. Her husband and her son never doubted that she was beautiful. Now, when she had been a memory for ten years and more, these two talked of her lovingly and with no constraint of gloom, as if she were still the pivot round which their daily life turned.

The elder man particularly delighted in dwelling upon the details of that earlier change in him, under her influence, to which allusion has been made. Emanuel had in his mind, from boyhood, no vision more distinct or familiar than this self-painted picture of his father—the idle, indifferent, unschooled, paltry-ideaed young gentleman of fashion—meeting all unawares this overpowering new force, and kneeling in awed yet rapturous submission before it. To the boy's imagination it became a historical scene, as fixed and well known in its

lines of composition as that of Nelson's death in the cockpit. He saw his beardless father in dandified clothes of the Corn-Laws-caricature period, proceeding along the primrose path of dalliance, like some flippant new Laodicean type of Saul of Tarsus—when "suddenly there shined around him a light from heaven." Lord Julius, indeed, thought and spoke of it in much that same spirit. The recollection that he had not known who Spinoza was tenderly amused him: it was the symbol of his vast oceanic ignorance of all things worth knowing.

"Ah, yes," the son used to say, "but if you had not had within yourself all the right feelings—only lacking the flash to bring them out—you would not have seen how wonderful she was. You would not have understood at all, but just passed on, and nothing would have happened."

And the father, smiling in reverie, and stroking his great beard, would answer: "I don't see that that follows. I remember what I was like quite vividly, and really there was nothing in me to explain the thing at all. I was a young blood about town, positively nothing more. No, Emanuel, we may say what we like, but there are things supernatural—that is, beyond what

we can see, and are prepared for, in nature. It was as unaccountable as magic, the effect your mother produced upon me from the beginning. At the end of a few hours, when it was time for me to take my leave, and I turned—there was a gulf in front of me, cutting me off from where I had been before I came to her, that very day. It was so wide, it seemed that I could barely see across it."

To any listener but Emanuel such language must have been extravagant. To him there were no words for overpraise of his mother. It was not alone that he had never seen her in anger or even vexation; that he had never known her to be in error in any judgment, or suspected in her an uncharitable or unkindly thought. These were mere negations, and the memory of her was full of positive influences, all wise and pure and lofty. Very early in life, when he began to look about the world he found himself in, he learned to marvel that there were no other such women anywhere to be seen. She had been so perfect, with seemingly no effort to herself! Why should other women not even try?

Emanuel had been born some ten years after the marriage of his parents, and they thus came into his baby consciousness as

persons of middle age, in appearance and its suggested authority at least, by comparison with the parents of other children he saw about him. Nowhere else, however, either then or in later years, did he see another home so filled from center to circumference with love, and tender gentleness of eye and word and deed. The perception that this environment was unique colored all his boyhood. It became a habit with him to set in contrast his own charmed existence against the unconsidered and uneven experiences of other children, and to ponder the meaning of the difference. As he grew up, the importance of this question expanded in his mind and took possession of it. He was consumed with the longing to make some effective protest against the peevish folly with which humanity mismanaged its brief innings of life. From the cradle to the grave the race swarmed stupidly along, elbowing and jostling in an aimless bustle, hot and ill-tempered through exertions which had no purpose; trampling down all weaker than themselves and cursing those who, in turn, had the strength to push them under; coming wearily at the end to the gate and the outer darkness of extinction, a futile and disappointed mob—having seen nothing, comprehended nothing, profited nothing.

The progress of a generation across the span of life might be made so serene and well-ordered and fruitful an affair! What else had man to concern himself about than this one thing—that "peace on earth, good will to men," should rule in his time? And how was it that this alone, of all possible problems, received from him no attention at all?

The impulse toward a mission was discernible in the lad; it altogether dominated the young man. His parents, regarding him lovingly and yet with wise inquiry, were fascinated by what they saw. A sense of lofty responsibility in their trusteeship for this beneficent new force formed a fresh bond between them, which grew to absorb within itself all their other ties. They came to regard themselves in no other light than as the parents of Emanuel. To preserve him from vitiating and stunting suggestions; richly to nourish, yet with an anxious avoidance of surfeit, both the soul and the mind within him; to give him strength and means and single-hearted courage adequate to the task he yearned to undertake—they asked nothing better of life than this.

After Oxford, he went abroad for a couple of years, having as a companion a young

Fellow of Swithin's, a trifle older than himself, who shared his moral attitude if not his passionate aspirations. He saw many parts of the world, and scrutinized closely in each the working of those portions of the social mechanism which interested him. Returning with a mass of notes and a mind packed with impressions and theories, he set to work to write a big book. At the end of a year he produced instead a small volume, dealing with one little phase of the huge, complex theme he had at heart. It was a treatise on the relations between parents and children, and it received very favorable reviews indeed. University men felt that it was what they had had the foresight to expect from this serious and high-minded young fellow, who was lucky enough to have the means and leisure for ethical essay-writing. Evidently he was going in for that sort of thing, and they noted with approbation that he had been at great pains with his style. Much to Emanuel's surprise, only some three hundred copies of the work were sold; upon reflection, he saw that it was no part of his plan to sell books, and he forthwith distributed the remainder of the edition, and another edition as well, among the libraries of the Three Kingdoms. Within the next three years two other brochures

went through much the same experiences. They treated respectively of primary education and of public amusements. Again the reviews were extremely cordial; again the men who had always predicted that Torr would do something regarded their prophetic intuition with refreshed complacency; again Emanuel drew considerable checks in favor of his publisher. What had been hinted at rather vaguely heretofore was now, however, announced with confidence in "literary" columns: these small volumes were merely chapters of a vast and comprehensive work to which the author had dedicated his life—the laborious exposition of a whole new philosophy of existence, to be as complete in its way as Herbert Spencer's noble survey of mankind.

Not long after came the death of Emanuel's mother—an unlooked-for event which altered everything in the world to the bereaved couple left behind. They went away together in the following month, with a plan of a prolonged tour in the Orient, but came back to England after a few weeks' absence, having found their proposed distraction intolerable. Lord Julius promptly invented for his own relief the device of taking over upon himself the drudgery of caring for his millions, which heretofore had been

divided among a banker, a broker, a solicitor and two secretaries. Emanuel saw his way less directly, but at last he found the will to begin a tentative experiment with some of his theories of life on a Somersetshire farm which his father gave him. The work speedily engrossed him, and expanded under his hands. He became conscious of growth within himself as well. The conviction that life is a thing not to be written about, but to be lived, formulated itself in his mind, and he elaborated this new view in an argument which persuaded his father. The Somersetshire estates of the family, which had been bought by Lord Julius in 1859, when the duke and his son Porlock joined to set aside the entail, were placed now unreservedly at Emanuel's disposal. What he did with them is to be seen later on.

At the moment, it was of the first importance that he should decide for himself the great question of celibacy v. marriage. The far-reaching projects which possessed his brain would, beyond doubt, be multiplied infinitely in value if precisely the right woman were brought in to share his enthusiasm and devotion. It was no whit less clear that they would dwindle into failure and collapse under the blight of the wrong woman. The dimensions of the risk so

impressed him, as he studied them, that for more than two years he believed himself to be irrevocably committed to the cold middle course of bachelorhood.

Then, by a remarkable stroke of good fortune, he met, fell in love with and married the sister of Lord Rosbrin, a young Irish peer whom he had known at Oxford. No one has ever doubted, he least of all, that she was the right woman.

He wrote no more books, in the years following this event, but gradually he became the cause of writing in others. A review article upon the character and aims of his experiment in Somersetshire, written in an appreciative spirit by an economist of position, attracted so much attention that the intrusion of curious strangers and inquisitive reporters threatened to be a nuisance. After this, his name was always mentioned as that of an authority, when sociological problems were discussed. There was even a certain flurry of inquiry for his books, though this did not turn out to have warranted the printing of the new popular edition. Sundry precepts in them became, however, the stock phrases of leader-writers. People of culture grew convinced that they were familiar with his works, and only a few months before the period at which we meet him, his university

had conferred upon him an honorary D.C.L., which gratified him more deeply than any other recognition his labors and attainments had ever received.

CHAPTER X

Christian, observing his celebrated cousin by daylight for the first time, perceived the necessity of revising some of the previous night's impressions.

Under the illumination of the shaded lamp and the glowing bank of peat on the study hearth, Emanuel in his velvet jacket and slippered ease had seemed a delicately refined creature, of so ethereal a type that life for it outside the atmosphere of books, and of a library's thought and talk, would be unnatural, or even impossible. With his back to the afternoon sunshine, however, and with rough, light clothes suggesting fresh-air exercise, Emanuel was a different person.

In stature he was a trifle taller than Christian; perhaps he was also something heavier, but what the newcomer noted most about the figure was the wiry vigor of muscular energy indicated in all its lines and movements. There was apparent no trace of any physical resemblance to his father, the massive Lord Julius, and Christian, as this

fact occurred to him, remembered what he had heard about the race from which the mother had come. He could not say that Emanuel's face was like anything which he had thought of as distinctively Jewish. The forehead was both broad and prominent, and at the top, where early baldness exposed the conformation of the skull, there were curious sutural irregularities of surface which attracted attention. The rest of the face was indefinably distinguished in effect, but not so remarkable. Christian thought now that it was a more virile countenance than he had imagined it to be. Vague suggestions of the scholarly dreamer flitted through its expressions now and again, but it was still above all things the face of a man of action.

Christian had said to himself, in that crowded instant of analysis, that he had never seen any Jewish face which at all resembled this of his cousin's. Yet somewhere he had seen a face so like it!—the memory puzzled and absorbed his mind. The same crisping, silky black-brown hair; the same full line of brow and nose; the same wide-open dark eyes, intently comprehending in their steady gaze—how strangely familiar they were to him! He saw them again in his mind's eye, and they had the same shadow-casting background of sun-

light—only as he looked at the mental picture, this sunlight was fiercer and hotter, and there was a golden, hazy distance of purple-blue sea. Suddenly he laughed aloud, and his brain was alive with recollections.

"I never recognized you last night," he declared. "Is it not strange that I should have been so blind? But seeing you in the sunlight—ah, I remember you well enough."

Emanuel smiled too, a little awkwardly. "Of course I was not making any secret of it," he said. "It would have come up naturally, sooner or later, in the course of talk."

But Christian had turned to the lady, and was speaking with gay animation. "He it is whom I have so often thought of, for years now, as the 'mysterious stranger' of my poor little romance. How long is it ago? Oh, ten years perhaps, since I saw him first. It was at Toulon, and I was walking along the quai in the late afternoon, and he stopped me to ask some question, and we fell to walking together and talking—at first about the old town, then of myself, because he wished it so. A long time passed, and lo! I saw him again. This time he came into Salvator's little shop at Cannes—it was in the Rue d'Oran—and I was alone, and we talked again—it seems to me for more than

an hour. And I wondered always who he could be—because he made me feel that he had friendly thoughts about me. And then, once more—it was a year ago last summer—he met me again, and came and sat beside me on a seat in the Jardin Public, at Nice. It must have been in June, for the season was ended, and it surprised me that he should be there."

"Oh, yes, I know all about it," put in Kathleen. "He told me of his seeing you, and what he thought of you, almost as soon as your back was turned. But at that time, of course—things hadn't happened."

"Ah, but he wanted to be kind to me, even then," the young man broke forth, with a glow in his eyes. "I felt that in his tone, the very first time, when I was the young boy at school. Oh, I puzzled my brain very often about this young English gentleman who liked to talk to me. And here is a curious thing, that when the Crédit Lyonnais gave me my summons to come to England, it was of him that I thought first of all, and wondered if he had not some part in it. And then I was so dull—I come to his own house, and sit at his own table with him as my cousin, and do not know him at all! It is true that he had no beard then—but none the less I am ashamed." He

spread his hands out and smiled a deprecatory gesture at them both as he added: "But then everything has been upside down in my mind since I came to England. It has been as if I were going up the side of a straight cliff in a funicular railway—my heart throbbing in terror, my brain whirling—afraid to look down, or out, or to realize where I was. But to-day I am happily at the end of the journey, and the good safe ground is well under my feet—and so I am not confused any more, but only very, very glad."

The elder couple exchanged a frankly delighted smile over the enthusiast's head. "You take him for a stroll about the place," said the wife. "Perhaps I will come and find you, later on."

In obedience to the suggestion, the two men turned, and went off together across the lawn.

Emanuel began speaking at once. "My father," he said, "has given me a rough outline of what you have seen and heard. In the nature of things, it could not all be pleasant."

"Oh, I have quite forgotten the unhappy parts," the young man declared. "I resolved to do that; it would be folly to remember them."

"They have their uses, though," persisted the other. "I wanted you to start out with just that impression of the family's seamy side. We have an immense deal to make up to the people about us, and to humanity in general, have we Torrs. It seemed to me that you could not realize this too early in your experience here. What impressions did Caermere itself make upon you?"

Christian hesitated a little, to give form to his thoughts. "'I am imagining it in my mind," he said at last, slowly, and with extended hands to shape his meaning to the eye, "as a huge canvas, one of the very biggest. As it happens, there is an unpleasant picture on it now, but that can be wiped out, covered over, and then on the vast blank surface a new and splendid picture may be painted—if I have the skill to do it." He paused, as his companion nodded comprehension of the figure, and then added abruptly: "I have not put the question direct before—but it is really the case that I am to succeed my grandfather—to be duke of Glastonbury, is it not?"

"Yes," answered Emanuel, gravely. "That is the case."

"Lord Julius told me to ask you everything," Christian went on, in defense of his curiosity. "But, grand Dieu! there is

so much to ask! Shall I be a rich man, also? There are dukes in France who can scarcely give a dinner to a friend—and in Italy who are often in doubt about even their own dinners. I understand that English dukes are different—but it has been said to me that my grandfather, for example, is not a rich man. He would be rich, no doubt, in some other station, but as a duke he is poor. Shall I also be poor?"

Emanuel smiled, more, it seemed, to himself than for the benefit of the young man. With amusing deliberation he took from his pocket a little oblong book with flexible covers. "Have you ever owned a check-book?" he asked drily.

Christian shook his head.

"Well, this is yours. It came from London this morning. I have written here on the back of the first check, on the part that remains in the book, these figures. They show what the bank holds at your disposal at the present moment."

Christian took the book, and stared with awe at the figures indicated. "Three thousand pounds! That is to say, seventy-five thousand francs! But—I do not understand. What portion is this of my entire fortune? There is more besides—to come at some future period—n'est ce pas?"

The sum itself had seemed at first glance to be of bewildering dimensions. Soberer second thoughts, however, told him that he had been lifted into a social stratum where such an amount might easily come and go a number of times during one's life.

"Well," Emanuel began, hesitating in turn over his phrases, "strictly speaking, you have no fortune at all. This money has been placed to your credit by my father—or if you like, by us both—to put you in a position of independence for the time being. You are quite free to spend it as you like. But—this is a somewhat delicate matter to explain—but we look to you in turn to be more or less guided by us in, say, your mode of life, your choice of associates and—and so on. Don't think that we wish in the least to hamper your individual freedom. I am sure you will feel that that is not our way. But we have formed very high hopes indeed for your career and—how shall I make you understand?—it rests a good deal with us to say how far the realization of these hopes warrants us in going on. That isn't plain to you, I see. Well, to put it frankly, you have nothing of your own, but we turn our money over to you because we believe in you. If unhappily—let us suppose the very improbable case—we should find ourselves no

longer believing in you, why then we should feel free to reconsider our financial responsibilities towards you. That is stating it very baldly—not at all as I should like to have put it—but it gives you the essence of the situation."

They had paused, and Christian regarded him with a troubled face. "Then if you come not to like me, or if I make mistakes, you take everything away from me again? I have never heard of a system like that. It seems to place me in a very strange position."

The youth's mobile countenance expressed such wistful dejection, as he faltered out these words, that Emanuel hastened to reassure him.

"No, no," he urged, putting a brotherly hand on his shoulder, "it is the fault entirely of the way I explained it. No one will ever take anything away from you. In all human probability you will live and die a wealthy and powerful nobleman—and perhaps something a good deal more than that. But let me show you the situation in another way. You have seen your grandfather—so I need say little about him. When he had reached the age of fifty or thereabouts he had come to the end of his resources. Since the estates were entailed, nothing could be sold or mortgaged, and debts of all sorts were

crowding in upon him and his eldest son, Lord Porlock. They were at their wits' end to keep going at all; Porlock could not hold his head up in London, much less marry, as he was expected to do. If it had not been for the invention of life insurance, they could hardly have found money to live from week to week. That was in 1858 or '9, when I was two or three years old. It was then that my father adopted his policy toward the older branch of the family. As you perhaps know, he was a very rich man. He came forward at this juncture, and saved the duke and his household from ruin."

"That was very noble of him. It is what I should have thought he would do," interposed Christian. They had begun walking again.

"Oh, I don't know that noble is quite the word," said Emanuel. "The element of generosity was not very conspicuous in the transaction. The truth is that the duke and his son were not people that one could be generous to. They had to be bound to a hard-and-fast bargain. They agreed between them to break the entail, so that all the estates could be dealt with as was deemed best, and bound themselves to sell or mortgage nothing except to my father, unless with his consent. He on his side

settled seventy thousand pounds on Porlock and his heirs, thus enabling him to marry, and he not only purchased from the duke the Somerset properties, of which this is a part, but he bought up his debts at the sacrifice of a good many thousands of pounds, so that in practice he became his brother's only creditor. No doubt there *was* generosity in that—since he cut down the rate of interest to something almost nominal by comparison with the usury that had been going on—but his motive was practical enough. It was to get complete financial mastery of the family estates. Nearly forty years have passed since he began; to-day he holds mortgages on practically every acre. If it were not for the mine near Coalbrook, which latterly yields the duke a certain surplus over the outlay at Caermere, my father would probably own it all outright. Well, you have followed it so far, haven't you?"

Christian thoughtfully nodded his head. "These are not affairs that I have been brought up to understand," he commented, "but I think I comprehend. Only this—you speak of your father's adopted policy; that means he has a purpose—an aim. The lady at the castle—Lady Cressage—spoke to me about this, and I wish—"

"Ah, yes, you met her," interposed

Emanuel. "I am not sure she was the best fitted to expound our policy to you."

"Oh, she was very sympathetic," the young man hastened to insist. "She had the warmest praises for both you and your father. And I could not but feel she wished me well, too."

Emanuel made no immediate reply, but walked slowly along, revolving silent thoughts, with a far-away, deliberative look in his eyes. When he spoke at last, it was to revert with abruptness to the earlier topic. "The policy, as we are calling it," he said, "can be put in a nutshell. We take that kind of pride in the family which impels us to resolve that, if we cannot induce it to do great things, we will at least prevent it doing base things. The position which your grandfather inherited was one of remarkable opportunities, and also of exceptional responsibilities. He was unfit to do anything with the opportunities, and as for the responsibilities, he regarded them with only ignorant contempt. His immediate heirs were very little better. It became a problem with us, therefore, how best to limit their power for harm. Money was the one force they could understand and respect, and we have used it accordingly. I say 'we' because as the situation has gradually developed itself, it

is hard to say which part of it is my father's and which mine—and still more impossible to imagine what either of us would have done independently of my mother. I will tell you more about her sometime. It was she, of course, who brought the money to us, but she brought much else besides. However, we will not enter upon that at the moment. Well, suddenly, last summer, the deaths changed everything. Up to that time, what we had been doing had had, so to speak, only a negative purpose. We had been keeping unfit people from parading their unfitness in too scandalously public a fashion. But all at once the possibility of doing something positive—something which might be very fine indeed—was opened up before us. As you know now, we were aware of your existence, but there were inquiries to be made as to—well, as to the formal validity of your claim. After that, there was some slight delay in tracing your whereabouts—but now you are here, at last."

"Now I am here, at last!" Christian repeated softly. He looked up into the sky; somewhere from the blue an invisible lark filled the air with its bubbling song. He drew a long breath of amazed content, then turned to his companion.

"That men like you and your father should

be making plans and sacrifices for one like myself," he said—"it is hard for me to realize it. There is nothing for me to say but this—that I will spare no thought or labor to be what you want me to be. And you will make it all clear to me, will you not? in every detail what it is I am to do?"

"Oh, hardly to that length," said Emanuel. He smiled once more—that grave, sweet, introspective smile of his, which suggested humor as little as it did flippancy—and spoke more freely, as if conscious that the irksome part of his task lay behind him. "We dream a great dream of you, but it would be folly to attempt to dictate to you at every stage of its realization. That would do you more harm than good, and it would be unfair to both parties, into the bargain. No, what I desire is to show you the practical workings of a system, and to fill you with the principles and spirit of that system. I think it will interest you deeply, and I hope you will see your way to making it, in its essentials at least, your own. It has taken me many years to build it up, and I can't pretend to suppose that you will grasp it in a week or a year. But you will see at least the aim I have in view, and you will get a notion of how I progress toward it. I shall be satisfied, for the time being, merely

to commend it to your judgment as the aim which you might do well to set before you.—It occurs to me to ask you: have you decided opinions in politics?"

Christian shrugged his shoulders diffidently. "In France my friends were of many parties, but since I thought never of myself as a Frenchman, I did not take sides with any of them. My brother Salvator is very advanced indeed; he is a Free Mason, and his friends are Carbonari in Italy and Socialists in France. But to me, these things had not much meaning. I said always to myself that I was English, and I read journals from London when I could, to learn about English parties. But it was not easy to learn. I stood in the streets often at Cannes in the early spring to see Mr. Gladstone when he passed, and to take off my hat to him, because I read that he was the greatest Englishman. But then I talked with English people on the Riviera about him, and they all cursed and ridiculed him, and told me that in England no respectable people would so much as speak to him. So it is very hard to know the truth—when you are born and bred in another country."

"Even those who are born here do not invariably agree upon definitions of the truth," commented Emanuel. "But I was

not speaking of parties or politicians, so called. Politics, in its bigger sense, means the housekeeping of humanity—the whole mass of interests that the individuals of the human race have in common. But I don't want to generalize to you. Let us stop here for a few minutes; I have brought you to this point that you may get the view."

Their leisurely stroll through pastures and meadows, and latterly across a strip of grassy common dotted with sheep, had brought them by a gradual ascent to the summit of a knoll, crowned by a group of picturesquely gnarled and twisted old trees, the boughs of which were all pointed backward in the direction whence the men had come. Christian, coming to the ridge and halting, confronted the unexpected breeze, steady and sustained as an ocean swell, which he could hear murmuring through the land-ward bent branches overhead. In front of him, at the distance of a stone's throw, the sloping heath abruptly ended in what for the instant he supposed was the sky-line—and then saw to be a vast glittering expanse of water, stretching off to an illimitable horizon.

"Oh, the sea!" he cried out, in surprised delight. "I had never dreamed that we were near it."

He could distinguish now the faint intermittent rustle of the waves on the hidden beach far below. Perhaps a mile out the profile of a craft under full sail shone magically white in the sunlight. He knew it to be a yacht, and began watching it with an intuitive appreciation of its beauty of line and carriage. Then in a sudden impulse he swung around and faced his companion. "I do not like to look at it," he broke out nervously. "I am afraid to see the ghosts of those cousins who were drowned—killed to make room for me. Where their yacht went down on the rocks—was that close by here?"

"At least sixty miles away—in that direction," and Emanuel gave an indifferent nod towards the west. "I wouldn't encourage ghosts of any sort, if I were you, but theirs would be least of all worth while. I wanted you to look about you from here—not specially seaward, but in all directions. There is a small village at the water's edge, almost directly under our feet, which can't be seen from above—we will get round to it, perhaps to-morrow—but look in other directions. As far as you can see along the coast to right and left—and inland, too—the system I spoke of is in operation. It is all my land. Get the scope of it into your mind.

Roughly speaking, you can see over some nine or ten thousand acres. Imagine that multiplied by seven or eight, and you will have an idea of the territory that your grandfather still owns—at least nominally."

Christian kept a rapt gaze upon the prospect, and strove in silence to grasp the meaning of the words.

"On the land that you see before you," Emanuel went on, "in one capacity or another, nearly two thousand human beings have homes. On your grandfather's estates there must be nearly if not quite ten times that number. Think what this means. You will be in a position to affect the prosperity, the happiness, the well-being, body and soul, of fifteen or twenty thousand people. It is a little nation—a small kingdom—of which you will be the head."

The young man turned slowly and forced himself to look out upon the deep, but still said nothing.

"This position you may make much of, or little, or worse than nothing at all," the other continued. "It is a simple enough matter to put the work and the responsibility upon other shoulders, if you choose to do it. Many very respectable men born to such positions do wash their hands of the worry and labor in just that fashion. They

lead idle lives, they amuse themselves, they take all that is yielded to them and give nothing in return—and because they avoid open grossness and scandal their behavior attracts no particular attention. In fact, it is quite taken for granted that they have done the natural thing. Being born to leisure, why should they toil? Possessing the title to wealth and dominion and the deference of those about them, why should they be expected to go to work and earn these things which they already own? That is the public view. Mine is very different. I hold that a man who has been born to a position of power among his fellows, and neglects the duties of that position while he accepts its rewards, is disgraced. It is as dishonest as any action for which less fortunate persons go to prison."

"Yes, that is my feeling, also," said Christian in low, earnest tones. "It's all true—but—"

"Ah, yes, the 'But,'" commented Emanuel, with his perceptive smile. "Now let me explain to you that I have met this 'But,' and done battle with it, and put it under my feet. I began planning for this struggle when I was very young. All the good people I knew admitted frankly the evils I speak of; they saw them quite clearly, and

talked with eloquence and fine feeling about them, and at the finish they said 'But!'—and changed the subject, and everything went on as before. It became apparent to me that this eternal 'But' is the enemy of the human race. There it stood forever in the path, blocking every attempt of benevolent and right-minded people to advance in real progress. So I said: at least one life shall be given to the task of proving that there need be no 'But.' I have been working here now for years, upon lines which were carefully thought out during other years of preparation. The results are in most respects better than I could have expected; they are certainly many-fold better than any one who had not my faith could have believed possible. Sundry limitations in the system I have, no doubt, discovered. Some things which seemed axiomatic on paper do not work themselves out the same way in practice—but as a whole the system is recognized now as having justified itself. There was an article in the 'Fortnightly' on it last November which I will give you to read. I have written some chapters upon certain phases of it, myself, which you might also look at. But the principal thing is that you should see the system itself in full operation."

"I am eager to begin," declared the young man, with fervor.

They had turned by tacit consent, and were sauntering back again over the short, soft grass of the heath.

Emanuel paused and picked from a furze-bush a belated spray of bright yellow blossoms. As he continued his walk, he pulled one of these flowers to pieces, and attentively examined the fragments.

"I gather that you are much interested in flowers," said Christian, to make conversation.

The other laughed briefly, as he threw the stuff aside, then sighed a little. "Too much so," he answered. "I wish I had the courage to give it up altogether. It murders my work. I spend sometimes whole hours in my greenhouses when I ought to be doing other things. The worst of it is that I realize perfectly the criminal waste of time—and still I persist in it. There is something quite mysterious in plants—especially if you have grown them yourself. You can go and stand among them by the hour, and look from one to another, with your mind entirely closed to thoughts of any description. I used to assume that this mental rest had a recuperative value, but as I get older I suspect that it is a kind of lethargy instead

—a mere blankness that can grow upon one. I find myself, for example, going incessantly to see certain pans of my own hybridized seedlings—and staring aimlessly at them till I get quite empty-headed. Now, I am too busy a man to be able to afford that."

"But if you get pleasure from it," expostulated Christian, gently.

"We have no right to think of our pleasure," Emanuel asserted with decision, "while any duty remains unperformed. And rightly considered, duty *is* pleasure, the very highest and noblest pleasure. The trouble is that even while our minds quite recognize this, our senses play us tricks. For example, when I saw how much time I was wasting on flowers, I tried to turn the impulse into a useful channel. The blossoms of fruit trees, for instance; the growth and flowering and seeding processes of melons and broad-beans and potatoes and so on, are just as interesting and worthy of study, and they mean value to humanity into the bargain. So I said I would concentrate my attention upon them, instead—but there was some perverse element in me somewhere; I couldn't do it. The mere knowledge that these excellent vegetables were of practical utility threw me off altogether. They bored

me—so I went shamefacedly back to the roses and fuchsias and dahlias."

"They have wonderful dahlias at Caermere," interposed Christian. "I walked for a long time among them with Lady Cressage, and she told me all their names. Poor lady, she is very sad, in spite of the flowers. I—I think I should like to say it to you—I find myself very sorry for her. And—such a bewildering number of things are to be done for me—is there not something that can be done for her?"

Emanuel walked slowly on in silence for some moments, regarding his companion's profile out of the corner of his eye, his own face showing signs of preoccupation meantime. When at last he spoke, the question seemed to have lost itself in convolution of his thoughts.

"Considering their northern exposure," he said meditatively, "they grow an extraordinary amount of fruit at Caermere."

CHAPTER XI

At the end of a fortnight Christian found himself able to confront the system, and even look it in the face, with a certain degree of mental composure. He was far from imagining that he had comprehended it all, but the thought of it no longer made his brain whirl by the magnitude of its scope, or frightened him by its daring. The implication that he was expected to do still more with it than Emanuel, its inventor and evangel, had done, possessed its terrors, no doubt, but one is not young for nothing. The buoyancy of youth, expanding genially amid these delightful surroundings, thrust these shadows off into the indefinite future, whenever they approached.

This system need not detain us long, or unnerve us at all. Lord Julius had spoken figuratively of it as the Pursuit of Happiness; perhaps that remains its best definition.

Like other systems, it was capable of explanation by means of formulas; but the most lucid and painstaking presentation of these could not hope to convey complete

meaning to the mind. Stated in words, Emanuel's plan hardly appealed to the imagination. Save for a few innovations, not of primary importance, it proceeded by arguments entirely familiar to everybody, and which indeed none disputes. Most of its propositions were the commonplaces of human speech and thought. The value of purity, of cheerfulness, of loyalty, of mercy—this is not gainsaid by any one. The conception of duty as the mainspring of human action is very old indeed. For this reason, doubtless, Emanuel's efforts to expound his System by means of books had failed to rivet public attention. He could only insist afresh upon what was universally conceded, and Mr. Tupper before him had done enough of this to last several generations.

Viewed in operation, however, the System was another matter. Our immemorial platitudes, once clothed in flesh and blood, informed with life, and set in motion under the sympathetic control of a master mind, became unrecognizable.

Emanuel as a lad had thought much of the fact that he was of the blood of the Spinozas. When he learned Latin in his early boyhood, the task was sweetened and ennobled to his mind by the knowledge that

it would bring him into communion with the actual words of the great man, his kinsman. Later, when he approached with veneration the study of these words, the discovery that they meant little or nothing to him was almost crushing in its effects. Eventually it dawned upon his brain that the philosopher's abstractions and speculations were as froth on the top of the water; the great fact was the man himself—the serene, lofty, beautiful character which shines out at us from its squalid setting like a flawless gem. To be like Spinoza, but to give his mind to the real rather than the unreal, shaped itself as the goal of his ambitions.

It was at this period that he became impressed by the thought that he was also of the blood of the Torrs. On the one side the poor lens-grinder with the soul of an archangel; on the other the line of dull-browed, heavy-handed dukes, with a soul of any sort discoverable among them nowhere. Slowly the significance of the conjunction revealed itself to him. To take up the long-neglected burden of responsibilities and possibilities of the Torrs, with the courage and pure spirit of a Spinoza—there lay the duty of his life, plainly marked before him.

Ensuing years of reading, travel and reflection gave him the frame, so to speak,

in which to put this picture. He had from his childhood been greatly attracted by the glimpses which his father's library gave him of what is called the Mediæval period. As he grew older, this taste became a passion. Where predilection ended and persuasion began, it would be hard to say, but when he had arrived at man's estate, and stood upon the threshold of his life-work, it was with the deeply rooted conviction that the feudal stage had offered mankind its greatest opportunities for happiness and the higher life. That the opportunities had been misunderstood, wasted, thrown away, proved nothing against the soundness of his theory. He had masses of statistics as to wages, rent-rolls, endowments and the like at his fingers' ends, to show that even on its reverse side, the medieval shield was not so black as it was painted. As for the other side—it was the age of the cathedrals, of the Book of Kells, of the great mendicant orders, of the saintly and knightly ideals. It was in its flowering time that craftsmanship attained its highest point, and the great artisan guilds, proud of their talents and afraid of nothing but the reproach of work ill-done, gave the world its magnificent possessions among the applied arts. Sovereigns and princes vied with one another

to do honor to the noblest forms of art, and to bow to the intellect of an Erasmus, who had not even the name of a father to bear. Class caste was the rule of the earth, yet the son of a peasant like Luther could force himself to the top, and compel emperors to listen to him, more readily then than now. The bishop-princes of feudal England were as often as not the sons of swineherds or starveling clerks, whereas now no such thing could conceivably happen to the hierarchy. Above all things, it was the age of human character. Men like Thomas More, with their bewildering circle of attainments and their extraordinary individual force, were familiar products. In a thousand other directions, Emanuel saw convincing proofs that mankind then and there had come closest to the possibilities of a golden age. True, it had wandered off miserably again, into all manner of blind lanes and morasses, until it floundered now in a veritable Dismal Swamp of individualism, menaced on the one side by the millionaire slave-hunter, on the other by the spectral anarchist, and still the fools in its ranks cried out ceaselessly for further progress. Oh, blind leaders of the blind!

No. Emanuel saw clearly that humanity

could right itself by retracing its steps, and going back to the scene of its mistaken choice of roads. It had taken the wrong turning when it forsook the path of coherent and interdependent organization—that marvelously intricate yet perfectly logical system called feudalism, in which everybody from king to serf had service to render and service to receive, and mutual duty was the law of the entire mechanism.

Though Christian heard much more than this, enough has been said to indicate the spirit in which Emanuel had embarked upon the realization of his plan. The results, as Christian wonderingly observed them, were remarkable.

The estate over which the System reigned was compact in shape, and enjoyed the advantage of natural boundaries, either of waste moorland or estuaries, which shut it off from the outside world, and simplified the problem of developing its individual character. In area it comprised nearly fifteen square miles, and upon it, as has been said, lived some two thousand people. About half of these were employed in, or dependent upon, the industrial occupations Emanuel had introduced; the others were more directly connected with the soil. Whether artisans or farmers, however, they lived

almost without exception in some one of the six little villages on the property.

In each of these hamlets there were conserved one or more old timbered houses; the newer cottages had been built, not in servile imitation of these, but after equally old models, no two quite alike. As the "Fortnightly Review" article said, if the System had done nothing else it had "gathered for the instruction and delight of the intelligent observer almost a complete collection of examples of early English domestic architecture of the humbler sort." The numerous roads upon the estate were kept in perfect order, and were for the most part lined with trees; where they passed through the villages they were of great width, with broad expanses of turf, shaded by big oaks or elms, some of which had been moved from other spots only a few years before, to the admiring surprise of the neighborhood. Each village had a small church edifice of its own, quaintly towered and beautiful in form, and either possessing or simulating skillfully the graces of antiquity as well. Beside the church was a building presenting some one or another type of the tolsey-house of old English towns, devoted to the communal uses of the villagers. About the church and the tolsey was the public garden and common,

with a playground with swings and bars for the children at the back—and there was no grave or tombstone in sight anywhere. A hospitable, ivy-clad, low-gabled inn, with its long side to the street, was a conspicuous feature on each village green.

Christian retained a vivid recollection of entering one of these taverns with Emanuel, very early in his tour of observation. Above the broad, open door, as they went in, swung the cumbrous, brightly painted sign of "The Torr Arms." Two or three laborers in corduroys were seated on benches at the table, with tankards before them; they dragged their heavily shod feet together on the sanded floor, and stood up, when they saw Emanuel, touching their hats with an air of affectionate humility as he smiled and nodded to them. There was a seemingly intelligent and capable landlady in the bar, who drew the two glasses of beer which Emanuel asked for, and answered cheerfully the questions he put to her. Two bright-faced young women, very neatly dressed, were seated sewing in this commodious bar, and they joined in the conversation which Emanuel raised. Christian gathered from what he heard and saw that his cousin took an active interest in the fortunes of this tavern and of both its inmates and its

patrons, and that the interest and liking were warmly reciprocated. The discovery gave him a more genial conception of Emanuel's character than he had hitherto entertained.

"That is one of my most satisfactory enterprises," Emanuel had said when they came out. "We brew our own beer, as well as the few cordials which take the place of spirits, and I really feel sure it's the best beer obtainable in England. I am very proud of it—but I am proud of these taverns of ours too. That was one of the hardest problems to be solved—but the solution satisfies me better, perhaps, than anything else I have done. Nobody ever dreams of getting drunk in these 'pubs' of ours. Nobody dreams of being ashamed to be seen going into them or coming out. The women and children enter them just as freely, if they have occasion to do so, as they would a dairy or grocer's shop. They are the village clubs, so to speak, and they are constantly open to the whole village, as much as the church or the tolsey. But here is one of my parsons. I want you to take note of him—and I will tell you about his part in the System afterward. He is as interesting a figure in it as my publican."

A tall, fresh-faced, fair young man

approached them as Emanuel spoke, and was presented to the stranger as Father William. Christian observed him narrowly, as he had been bidden, but beyond the fact that he was clad in a somewhat outlandish fashion, and seemed a merry-hearted fellow, there was nothing noteworthy in the impression he produced. He stood talking for a few minutes, and then, with affable adieux, passed on.

"That is wholly my invention," commented Emanuel, as they resumed their walk. "There is one of them in each of the six villages, and a seventh who has a kind of general function—and really I have been extraordinarily fortunate with them all. They come from my college at Oxford—Swithin's—and when you think that twenty years ago it was the most bigoted hole in England, the change is most miraculous. These young men fell in with my ideas like magic. I don't suppose you know much about the Church of England. Well, it drives with an extremely loose rein. You can do almost anything you like inside it, if you go about the thing decorously. I didn't even have the trouble with the bishop which might have been expected. These young men—my curates, we may call them—have among themselves a kind of guild or confraternity.

They are called Father William, or Father Alfred; they wear the sort of habit you have seen; they are quite agreed upon an irreducible minimum of dogmatic theology, and an artistic elaboration of the ritual, and, above all, upon an active life consecrated to good works. They have their own central chapter-house, where they live when they choose and feel like enjoying one another's society, but each has his own village, for the moral and intellectual health of which he feels responsible. Without their constant and very capable oversight, the System would have a good many ragged edges, I'm afraid. But what they do is wonderful. They have made a study of all the different temperaments and natures among the people. They know just how to smooth away possible friction here, to encourage dormant energy there, to keep the whole thing tight and clean and sound. They specially watch the development of the children, and make careful notes of their qualities and capacities. They decide which are to be fully educated, and which are to be taught only to read and do sums."

"I am not sure that I understand," put in Christian. "Is not universal education a part of your plan?"

Emanuel smiled indulgently. "There was

never grosser nonsense talked in this world," he said, with the placid air of one long since familiar with the highest truths, "or more mischievous rubbish into the bargain, than this babble about universal education. The thing we call modern civilization is wrong at so many points that it is hard to say where it sins most, but often I think this is its worst offense. The race has gone fairly mad over this craze for stuffing unfit brains with encumbering and harmful twaddle. In the Middle Ages they knew better. The monks of a locality picked out the children whose minds would repay cultivation, and they taught these as much as it was useful for them to know. If the system was in honest operation, it mattered nothing whether these children belonged to the lord of the manor or the poorest peasant. Assume, for example, that there was a nobleman and one of his lowest dependents, and that each of them had a clever son and a dull one. The monks would take the two clever ones, and educate them side by side—and if in the end the base born boy had the finer mind of the two, and the stronger character, he would become the bishop or the abbot or the judge in preference to his noble school-fellow. On the other hand, the two dull boys were not wearied by schooling from which they could get no

profit. The thick-headed young noble, very often without even learning his alphabet, was put on a horse, and given a suit of armor and a sword; the heavy-witted young churl was given a leathern shirt and a pike or a bow, and bidden to follow behind that horse's tail —and off the two happy dunces went, to fulfill in a healthful and intelligent fashion their manifest destiny. Those were the rational days when human institutions were made to fit human beings—instead of this modern lunacy of either shaving down and mangling the human being, or else blowing him up like a bladder, to make him appear to fit the institutions. Of course, you must understand, I don't say that this medieval system worked uniformly, or perfectly, even at its best—and, of course, for a variety of reasons, it eventually failed to work altogether. But its principle, its spirit, was the right one—and it is only by getting back to it, and making another start with the light of experience to guide us this time, that we can achieve real progress. Fortunately, my parsons entered fully, and quite joyfully, into my feelings on this point. They couldn't have labored harder, or better, to make the System a success if it had been of their own invention."

"I have seen English parsons often," said

Christian, vaguely. "They are always married, n'est ce pas?"

"Oh, no—no!" answered Emanuel, with impatient emphasis. "That would never do here. It is difficult enough to find men fit to carry on the task we have undertaken. It would be asking too much of the miracle to expect also unique women who would bring help rather than confusion to such men. Oh, no—we take no risks of that sort. Celibacy is the very basis of their guild. It is very lucky that their own tastes run in that direction—because in any case it would have had to be insisted upon."

Christian wondered if he ought to put into words the comment which rose in his mind. "But you, and your father," he ventured—"you personally—"

"Ah," interposed Emanuel, with a rapt softening of expression in face and tone, "when women like my mother and my wife appear—that lifts us away from the earth and things earthly, altogether. But they are as rare as a great poem—or a comet. If they were plentiful there would be no need of any System. The human race would never have fallen into the mud. We should all be angels."

After a little pause he added: "The woman question here has been a very hard nut to

crack. We have made some progress with it—but it is still one of the embarrassments. Of course there are others. The restless young men who leave the estate, for example, and having made a failure of it elsewhere, come back to make mischief here: That is an awkward subject to deal with. The whole problem of our relations to outsiders is full of perplexities. To prevent intercourse with them is out of the question. They come and go as they like—and of course my own people are equally free. I can't see my way to any restrictions which wouldn't do more harm than good—if indeed they could be enforced at all. I have to rely entirely upon the good sense and good feeling of my people, to show them how much better off they are in every way than any other community they know of, and how important it is for them to keep themselves to themselves, and continue to benefit by their good fortune. If they fail to understand this, I am quite powerless to coerce them. And that is where the women give us trouble. It is the rarest thing for us to have any difficulty with the men. They comprehend their advantages, they take a warm interest in their work, and we have developed among them a really fine communal spirit. They are proud of the System, and fond of

it, and I can trust them to defend it and stand by it. But this isn't true of all the women. You have always the depressing consciousness that there are treacherous malcontents among them, who smile to your face but are planning disturbance behind your back. It is not so much a matter of evil natures as of inferior brains. Let a soldier in a red coat come along, for example—an utterly ignorant and vulgar clown from heaven knows what gutter or pigsty—and we have girls here who would secretly value his knowledge of the world, and his advice upon things in general, above *mine!* How *can* you deal with that sort of mind?"

Christian smiled drolly, and disclaimed responsibility with a playful outward gesture of his hands. "It is not my subject," he declared.

"But it has to be faced," insisted Emanuel. "My wife has devoted incredible labor and pains to it—and on the surface of things she has succeeded wonderfully. I say the surface, because that is the sinister peculiarity of the affair; you can never be sure what is underneath. When you go up to London, you must do as I have done since I was a youth: take a walk of a bright afternoon along Regent Street and Oxford Street, where the great millinery and drapers' and

jewelers' shops are, and study the faces of the thousands of well-dressed and well-connected women whom you will see passing from one show-window to another. There will be many beautiful faces, and many more which are deeply interesting. But one note you will catch in them all—or at least in the vast majority—the note of furtiveness. Once you learn to recognize it you will find it everywhere—the suggestion of something hidden, something artfully wrapped up out of sight. God knows, I don't suggest they all have guilty secrets—or for that matter secrets of any sort. But they have the trained facial capacity for concealment; it is their commonest accomplishment; their mothers' fingers have been busy kneading their features into this mask of pretense from their earliest girlhood."

"Would you not find it also on the men's faces?" demanded Christian, with a dissolving mental vision of sly masculine visages before him as he spoke. "That is to say, when once you had learned to detect the male variation of the mask? And even if it is so, then is not the reason of it this—that men have long been their own masters, making their own laws, doing freely what they choose; and there is no one before whom they must dissemble?"

Emanuel had not the temperament which is attracted by contradiction. He listened to his cousin's eager words, seemed to ponder them for a space, and then began talking of something else.

Those whom Emanuel called "his people" were for the most part descendants of families who had been on the soil for centuries—since before the Torrs came into possession of it. In a few cases, their stock had been transplanted from the Shropshire estates of the same house. Emanuel had discerned it to be an essential part of the System that its benefits should be reaped by those to whom his family had historic responsibilities. The reflection that the Torrs in Somerset only went back at the farthest to Henry VIII.'s time, and became large landlords there so recently as Charles II.'s reign, saddened him when he dwelt upon it. He would have given much to have been able to establish the System at Caermere instead, where the relations between lord and retainer had subsisted from the dawn of tribal history. He dwelt a good deal upon this aspect of the matter in his talks with Christian. "If you take up the idea," he would say, "you will have the enormous advantage of really ancient ties between you and your people. Here in Somer-

set we are, relatively speaking, new-comers—merely lucky bridegrooms or confiscating interlopers of a few generations' standing. I have had to create my feudal spirit here out of whole cloth. But you at Caermere—you will find it ready-made to your hand."

Emanuel had created much more besides. The villages hummed with the exotic industries he had brought into being. The estate produced most of its raw material—food, wool, hides, peat for domestic fuel, stone in several varieties for building, and numerous products of the sea. It drew coal, wood and iron across the channel from the Caermere properties. The effort of the System had been from the outset to expand its self-sufficiency. Christian saw now the remarkable results of this effort on both sides. One village had its leather workers, beginning with the tanners at one end and finishing with the most skillful artificers—glovers, saddlers and shoemakers—at the other. A second village possessed its colony of builders—masons and carpenters alike—and with them guiding architects and designers of furniture and carving. Here also were the coopers, who served not only the brewery, but the butter-makers. These latter formed in turn a link with the great dairy establishment, which had for its flank

the farming lands. The gardens, nurseries, orchards and long glasshouses were nearest to Emanuel's residence, and their workers made up the largest of the hamlets. This was in other senses the metropolis of the state, for here were the printing-press, the bindery, the chemical laboratory, the electric-light plant, the photographic and drawing departments, the clergy house and the estate office. The smallest of the villages was in the center of the stock farm, where scientific breeding and experimental acclimatization had attained results of which the staid "Field" spoke in almost excited terms.

But to Christian's mind by far the most interesting village was that nestled on the sea-shore, under the protection of the cliffs. When he had once seen this place, his cousin found it difficult to get him away from it, or to enlist his attention for other branches of the System. There was a small but sufficient wharf here, to which colliers of a fair burden could have access; shelter was secured for the home-built fishing craft in the little harbor by means of a breakwater. The red-roofed, gray-stone cottages clustered along the winding roadway which climbed the cliff made a picture fascinating to the young man's eye, but his greater delight was in something not at first visible. Around a

bend in the cove, out of sight of the village, was a factory for the manufacture of glass, and beyond this were pointed out to him other buildings, near the water's edge, which he was told were used for curing, pickling and otherwise preserving fish. "We make our own glass for the gardens and forcing houses, and for all the dwellings on the estate," Emanuel had told him, "and for another use as well."

The statement had not aroused his curiosity at the moment, but a little later, when he confronted the embodiment of its meaning, he murmured aloud in his astonishment. He found himself walking in a spacious corridor, beneath a roof of semi-opaque, greenish glass, and between walls that seemed of solid crystal, stretching onward as far as the eye could reach. A bar of sunlight, striking through aslant from somewhere outside, painted a central glowing prismatic patch of color, which reflected itself in countless wavering gleams of orange and purple all about him. A curious moving glitter, as of fountains noiselessly at play, traversed the upper surface of these glass walls, and flashed confusion at his first scrutiny. Then he gave a schoolboy's shout of joy and rushed forward to the nearest side. He was in a giant aquarium—and these were

actual fishes of the sea swimming placidly before him! Even as he stared in bewildered pleasure, with his nose flattened against the glass, there lounged toward him, across the domed back of a king-crab, the biggest conger he had ever imagined to himself. He put up a hand instinctively to ward off the advance of the impassive eel—then laughed aloud for glee.

"Oh, this is worth all the rest!" he cried to Emanuel.

"Yes, good idea, isn't it?" said the other. "It was my wife who suggested it. We had started making our own glass—and really this was a most intelligent way of using it. In time I think it will be of great value, too. We have some clever men down here, from time to time, to study the specimens. I'm sorry no one is here for the moment. I thought at first of building a residence for them, and putting it all at their disposal in a regular way as a kind of marine observatory, like that at Naples. But after all, it would hardly be fair to the system. My first duty is to my own people, and we've got some young men of our own who are making good use of it. There are a hundred or more of these tanks, and we are fitting up electrical machinery to get automatic control of the water supply, and to regulate the tem-

perature more exactly. But beyond the spectacle of the fishes themselves—our people make holiday excursions here every fortnight or so—and certain things we learn about food and fecundation and so on, I don't know that there's much to be said for the practical utility of this department. Further on you will see the oyster and mussel beds, and the lobsters and crabs. I attach much more importance to the experiments we are making out there. There seems almost no limit to what can be done in those fields, now that we have learned how to go to work. It is as simple a matter to rear lobsters as it is to rear chickens."

"But it is all wonderful!" cried Christian, once more. "But tell me—this costs a great sum of money. I am afraid to think how much. Is it your hope—shall you ever get a profit from it?"

Emanuel smiled. "There is no question of profits," he explained, gently. "The System as a whole supports itself—or rather is entirely capable of doing so. The capital that I have spent in putting the System upon its feet, so to speak, I count as nothing. It belonged to the people who had been with us all these centuries and I have merely restored it to them. In the eyes of the law it is all mine, and from that point of view I

am a much richer man than I was before the System began. But in practice it belongs to all my people. I take enough to live as befits my station; each of the others has enough to maintain him in *his* station, comfortably and honorably. Whatever the surplus may be, that is devoted to the objects which we all have in common. You see it is simplicity itself."

"But that is like my brother Salvator's doctrine," said Christian. "It is socialism, is it not?" Emanuel's fine brows drew together in an impatient frown. "Please do not use that word," he said, with a shade of annoyance in his tone. "The very sound of it affronts my ears. Nothing vexes me more than to have my work unthinkingly coupled with that monstrous imposture. If you will think of it, I am more opposed to what is called socialism than anybody else on earth. I have elaborated the one satisfactory system, on lines absolutely opposed to it. I furnish the best weapon for fighting and slaying that pernicious delusion that the whole world offers. So you see, I have a right to protest when people confuse me with my bitterest antagonist."

"Pardon!" said Christian, with humility. "I am so badly informed upon all these matters!"

"Ah, well, you will understand them perfectly, all in good time," his cousin reassured him in a kindly way.

Christian drew a furtive sigh as they moved along. To his fancy the large fishes in the tanks regarded him with a sympathetic eye.

CHAPTER XII

"It has done Emanuel a world of good to have you here," said Kathleen, on the morning of Christian's leave-taking. "Of course it has been a delight to us both—but he has had a personal benefit from it, too. He works too hard. He carries such a burden of details about in his mind—by day and by night, for he sleeps badly and is forever dreaming of his work—that companionship with some new and attractive mind is of the greatest rest and help to him. And he is very fond of you."

Christian nodded gratified acknowledgment of the words and their spirit, with a glow in his dark eyes. In little more than an hour he would be on his way to London —that mighty, almost fabulous goal of his lifelong dreams. He was already dressed for the journey, in a traveling-suit of rough, fawn-colored cloth, and as he sat at ease in the breakfast-room with his cousin's wife, his glance wandered very often from her face to a pleased contemplation of these garments. They were what he individually liked best in the wonderful collection of

clothes for which a fashionable tailor had come from London to measure him, and which were this moment being packed by the man up-stairs in bags and portmanteaus equally new. The tweeds enabled him to feel more like an Englishman than he had succeeded in doing before.

He smiled diffidently at her. "I am so excited about going," he said, his voice wavering between exuberance and appeal—"and yet I ought to be thinking of nothing but my sorrow in leaving you dear people. But that will come to me soon enough—in a storm of homesickness—when once I find myself really alone."

"Oh, I'll not deny we expect a *little* home-sickness," she replied to him, cheerfully—"but it must not be enough to at all take the edge off your spirits. Oh, you'll be vastly entertained and interested by all you see and hear. Young Lord Lingfield—you'll be seeing him to-night at dinner—he will be greatly pleased to take you about, and properly introduce you. He will do it better than any other we can think of. He is not by any means an intellectual gladiator, but he is good-looking and amiable and he goes everywhere."

"He is my relation, too, I think Emanuel said?"

"Let's work it out—his grandfather's sister was your grandmother. Yes, that is it. She was the Lady Clarissa Poynes, the sister of the old earl of Chobham, who used to wear the blue coat and brass buttons to the end of his days. So she would be the aunt of the present earl, and the grand-aunt of young Lingfield. You stand in exactly the same relationship to Lord Lingfield that you would to a son of Emanuel's—if he had one, poor man!"

Christian had long since become sensible of the pathos which colored these references to the childlessness of the house. A tender instinct impelled him to hasten a diversion.

"And how strange it is!" he cried. "They are as close to me, these people, in blood as Emanuel is—and yet I care nothing for them whatever. I shall meet them, and know them, and not feel that I am bound to them at all—whereas Emanuel is like a brother to me, whom I have been with and loved all my life. And you," he added, with a smile in his eyes—"you are more than any sister to me."

"Well, then, let me talk to you like a sister," she rejoined.

He thought he had not seen her before in precisely the mood which was discernible in her face and tone this morning. Outwardly

she was as gay and light-hearted as ever, and certainly she had not seemed on any previous day to come so near being beautiful as well. The sense of sheer pleasure in being where she was, in listening to her and looking at her, and holding her affectionately bright attention for his own thoughts, was peculiarly strong in him to-day. But there was also the consciousness of a new gravity in her attitude toward him—a kind of yearning apprehension of dangers threatening him. He saw again in her eyes when she looked at him that likeness to his mother's glance—a wistfully sad glance as he most often recalled it. And yet Kathleen smiled merrily with it all, when occasion required.

"You are entering upon the great experience now," she said to him. "I think it was very wise of Emanuel to show you first what we may call his ideal state of society. By all the rules, it ought to help you to understand in the right way what you will see of the society which—well, which isn't in an ideal state. But there are certain things which get to be understood, not so much by brains, as by years. That is to say, the very cleverest youth may not be able to see, in this one respect, what is plain enough to most dull persons at forty. Emanuel tells me

that he has talked with you about women in general."

"He does not like them very much," said Christian, laughingly.

She twisted the corners of her mouth in a droll little grimace, which seemed to express approval of his mirth, and something more besides.

"He takes them with tremendous seriousness," she answered. "That is his way with everything. He makes all sorts of classifications—the bigger they are and the more complicated the better he likes them—and then he treats each one as a problem, and he worries at it with all his energy until he works out a satisfactory solution. It is only in that sense that he has a grievance against women. He has proceeded upon the theory that the sex is a unit, for philosophical purposes at least, and that he ought to be able to get at the rules which govern its actions. But we continue to baffle him," she added, again with the playful curl of the lips.

"Oh, you—you are not in the problem," protested Christian. "For you and his mother he has only the veneration one gives to one's favorite saints."

"His mother was a great woman," said Kathleen, serious once more. "I never saw her, but she is my patron saint, as you put

it, quite as much as his. I never permit myself to doubt that we should have loved each other deeply—and it is the sweetest thing any one can think of me, or say to me —to link us together. But even the saints have their specialties—and that implies limitations. I have a notion that Emanuel's mother did not know many women, and so fell into a way of generalizing about them. Emanuel has that same tendency. I, who work among them daily, and make it my business to be teacher and mistress and mother and sister to some five hundred of them, young and old, foolish and wise—I come to believe that these generalizations are entirely mistaken. If a woman is brought up like a man, and circumstanced precisely like a man, and knows nothing of any conventions save those which control a man—why, then you can't tell the difference between her opinions and actions and those of her brother. But you never get the chance to view a woman under those conditions."

"But here we shall see them!" cried Christian, with premature enthusiasm. "You will change all that!"

"Oh, no, I shan't," she answered abruptly. "It is not being tried—it is not desirable. What I am doing proceeds quite on orthodox lines. We make a point of developing them

in the way of usefulness—material usefulness, I mean. We teach them the useful accomplishments—spinning, weaving, sewing, dairy and poultry work, and above all things good cooking."

"That I can well believe," he declared. "I have never eaten so many good dishes in my life as here."

"Yes, I *have* a talent in that direction," she assented. "And I am prouder of it because it represents a triumph over my ancestral prejudices. You will get nothing good to eat in Ireland. The Irish have never respected food as a proper subject for serious human thought. It is the rarest thing to hear them mention it. There may be some fine spiritual quality in that—but at all events we cook well here, and I have worked a complete revolution in that respect on the estate. There are certainly no such cooks and housekeepers anywhere else in England as my women. But you see what I mean. There is no effort to take women away from the work they have always been doing, but only to make them do it better."

"But that in itself is very much," urged Christian. Somehow he had the feeling that he was defending the System against a critic.

"Undoubtedly," she admitted. "And of course we do something more than that.

In a good many cases, when it was not inconvenient, I have put young girls of aptitude forward to learn designing and other arts. Some of them have made me some very tolerable tapestry, and a few of them are as intelligent and valuable in the greenhouses as our best men. In the matter of music they really beat them. Emanuel insists on a choir of glee singers in each village—and at Christmas time we have a competition of 'waits' which will be worth your while coming to hear. For my part, I have a string orchestra of girls that I should not be ashamed to have play in London."

The word seemed to bring them back. "You were going to speak to me," Christian ventured, "about London. One thing—I shall see you there often, shall I not?"

She slowly shook her head. "No, we have outgrown London, I'm afraid. It can be proved, I believe, that it is the biggest town in the world—but to us it is too small for comfort. It is now more than a year since we have been up at all. Why should we go? We have the National Gallery by heart, and the year's pictures are rather distressing than otherwise. The theaters are intellectually beneath notice. There is the opera of course, and the concerts, but the people annoy us by talking loudly, and

besides, we have our own music, and occasionally we bring down a Paderewski or a Sarasate for our people to hear. At the houses where we would naturally go, the women talk about matters of which I know absolutely nothing, and Emanuel either quarrels with the men about what they call their politics, or chokes silently with rage and disgust. And then the spectacle of the people in the streets—the poor of London!—that fairly sickens our hearts. We have no joy of going at all. Occasionally we have guests down here, but it is not a very happy time they have of it. Everything is so strange to them that they are confused, and walk about with constraint, as if they were being shown around an asylum. So it happens that I see very few women of my own class—and really know less about them than most people. And yet," she added, with a twinkle in her eye, "so naturally audacious a race are the Irish—it is precisely about ladies in London society that I am going to read you a lecture."

Christian drew up his feet, and assumed an air of delighted anticipation.

"First of all, you are six and twenty, and you will be thinking of marrying. What is more, you are what is called a great match, and for every thought that you give

to the subject of a wife, others will give ten thousand to the subject of you as a possible husband."

The young man looked into her kindly eyes with a sustained glance of awakening thought. This dazzling and princely position which she had thus outlined—sure enough, it was his! How extraordinary that this had not suggested itself to him before! Or had the perception of it not really lain dormant in his consciousness all the while? This question propounded itself to a mind which was engrossed in something else—for of a sudden there rose upon the blank background of his thoughts the luminous face of a lady, beautiful, distinguished, exquisitely sensitized, and as by the trick of a dream she first wore a large garden hat, and then was bare-headed, her fair hair gathered loosely back into a careless knot. The mental picture expanded, to show the full length of her queenly figure as she descended a broad staircase, with one lovely hand like a lily against the oak of the rail. Then it contracted, and underwent a strange metamorphosis, for it was another face which he saw, a pale, earnest, clever face, and instead of the great stairway, there was the laced tawdriness of a French railway compartment.

Then, with a start, and a backward move-

ment of the head, he was free of dreamland, and blushingly conscious of having stared his cousin out of countenance. He laughed with awkward embarrassment. "I—I suppose it is true—what you say," he remarked, stumblingly.

She had perhaps some clew to the character of his reverie. She smiled in a gently quizzical way, but went on soberly enough. "The thing of all things," she said, "is to be clearly and profoundly convinced in your own mind that your marriage will be the most important event of your life—that it will indeed affect, for good or for bad, every conceivable element of your life. You have the kind of temperament which would be peculiarly susceptible to such intimate influences. There are great numbers of men—the vast majority—to whom it does not matter so much. They accommodate themselves to their burdens, and shuffle along somehow, with the patience of a cart-horse. But you—the wrong wife would wreck you and kill you. I am speaking frankly, laddie,"—she gave the novel word an intonation which made it music in his ears—"because you have no mother, and because you are going into a very trying and delicate situation with what I feel to be a pathetic lack of preparation."

Christian drew his chair nearer to her, and crossed his knees, and leaned back in an attitude of intimate ease. The conversation appealed powerfully to him as having more of the atmosphere of domesticity and sweet home influences in it than any he had ever heard.

"I know almost nothing at all of women," he said, quite simply. "The mothers of my pupils I saw sometimes and occasionally a sister, but they were not in any sense my friends. As to marriage—of course that has never been in my head. Until only the other day, the idea of a wife would have been absurd. But now—as you say—it is not any longer absurd." He paused and gazed absently past her, as if in pursuit of the thoughts his own words had set in motion. "I wonder—I wonder"—he murmured, and then turned his bright eyes to her, full of wistful expectancy. "Have you, par exemple, some one in your mind for me?" he asked.

She laughed and shook her head. The implication in his tone, of entire readiness to accept the bride of her selection, had its amusing and its flattering sides; upon a second glance, however, it contained something else not so much to her liking. She frowned a little at this something.

"Oh, you must not approach the subject in that spirit," she adjured him. "It is the one affair of all others on earth in which you must be guided absolutely by your own heart and your own mind. We speak of the heart and mind as distinct from each other; I don't know that they are not one and the same. Perhaps I would put it this way—when your heart *and* your mind are completely agreed, when your personal liking and your deliberate judgment pull together in exactly the same direction—so that it seems to you that they *are* one and the same thing—then—then——"

"Then what?" demanded Christian, bending forward.

"Oh, I am not fortunate in expressing myself to-day," Kathleen declared, with a gesture of playful impatience. "But in general, this is what I wanted to say: Do not be betrayed into haste in this matter of deciding about a girl. You will see a large number of extremely attractive young ladies. They will certainly not be looking or behaving their worst for your benefit, and you on your side will be lacking the experience to tell precisely what it is all worth. So walk quietly along, with your wits about you, and see what there is to be seen for a time, and commit yourself to nothing. A year hence,

for example, you will look back upon your present condition of mind with surprise. You will not seem to yourself at all the same person. I can't promise that you'll be happier," she added, with a little smiling sigh, "but you will know a great deal more about what you want—or rather about making sure that you are getting what you want."

"I know what I shall do," he declared, after a moment's reflection. "I shall come always to you, and beg your wise and good advice. You will tell me if I am making a bad choice."

"You talk as if you were entering upon a lifelong series of experiments," she laughed at him. "No, I'll undertake no such responsibility as that, young man." She explained, more gravely: "It is never quite possible for a friend, no matter how wise and fond the friend may be, to advise upon this matter. To give information upon the subject, that is another affair. But specific advice, no. But let me finish what I had in mind to say. You have seen here, during this past fortnight, what great hopes are built upon your administration of your affairs when you come into the title. No, don't speak yet. You must not pledge yourself at all to the System. It would be unfair to let you do it. But at all events

you have seen it, and you will think it all over, and, whether you take it up altogether or not, I know it will have its effect on you. You will set an ideal of usefulness and duty before you, and you will have your heart fixed on realizing it. Well, then, I counsel you above all things to keep that idea in mind whenever you think of marriage. A man has a good many sides to his life, but the side which is most vital to him is that of the work he wants to do in the world. If the wife fits perfectly on that side, the discrepancies elsewhere are of small account by comparison. They smooth away, they adjust themselves. But the misfit on the side of the man's ambitions—that never effaces itself. And so, just in proportion as the work you want to do becomes clear in your mind, you ought to define to yourself the type of woman who will be most sympathetic toward that work, and who will best help you in it—or rather, who will help you in it in the way you like best. I don't say you will find the perfect type of that woman—but you should have the type before you, and be able to measure people by its standards. But I have harangued you long enough! There is something in the atmosphere here: we all deliver lectures to each other at the most unscrupulous length.

Poor boy! We've done nothing but make speeches to you since you showed in sight."

Christian deprecated her suggestion with persuasive hands. "I have learned here, I think, all that I know," he protested. He did not, however, insist upon further generalizations. "One thing you said," he remarked, thoughtfully, "puts a question into my head. You said it was better to give information than advice. Now there is so much that I am in ignorance about. Perhaps I do wrong to ask you—but I am curious to know more about the people of the family—our own family. There are no ladies of my own blood? I mean, all I have seen or heard of come to us by marriage, like yourself."

"You hit upon the weakest and unhappiest point," she replied. "There has not been a daughter born in the Torr family for over a hundred years. I have always insisted that this has operated like a curse on the family. The beautiful humanizing charm of little girls about the house—this they have never felt. The mothers have had no daughters to lean upon, the men have never known what a sister was like. That one fact, it seems to me, is enough to account for everything that is hard and rough and cruel in their story."

Christian bowed his head in silent token of comprehension.

"I am always more grieved than angry, when I'm thinking of the black sheep in the family fold," she went on. "They had never a chance. It was like a tradition in the family that the father should be a brute and the mother a fool. A daughter here and there might have softened the combination—but with little boys alone face to face with it—what could they do? They grew up in the stables and the kennels. Think of those two young men whom you met at Caermere, for example. Lord Julius told me of their scene with you, and I'm far from blaming you—but think of their bringing up! Their father, Lord Edward, I remember very well. I saw him when I was a girl, at the Punchestown races, and my brother told me his name. Even without it, I should have remembered his face as the coarsest and meanest I ever saw. He married a woman out of some vile gambling set that he was in as a young man. She is still alive somewhere, and has an allowance from Lord Julius for suppressing herself, and not using the family name. Well, when I think of the blood in those two boys, and of the horrors of their childhood till they were taken away from their mother,

and sent into the country to school—upon my soul I can only wonder that they come so near decency as they do. Your encounter with them happened to strike out sparks, but you must remember what a blow it represented to them."

The young man gave a somewhat perfunctory nod. His sympathies were somehow obdurate upon this particular point.

"Oh, and that reminds me," she went on. "I said that the family was daughterless—but Eddy has a little girl. It is very quaint to think what she will grow up like, under the maternal wing of Cora Bayard. Yet I am told there are worse mothers than Cora. I've never seen her, myself."

"I saw her at Caermere," Christian remarked. "She seemed very frightened and sad—and since it was because of me, I did not look much at her. I remember only the effect of a likeness to Pierrot—the red lips on the white face. But"—he drew his chair still nearer, and betrayed by manner and tone alike his approach to a subject of more than casual interest—"the other lady whom I saw there—Lady Cressage—I had much conversation with her. I feel that she and I are friends. I liked her very much indeed—but I have no information about her whatever. If I am permitted to confess it—I

tried to talk about her with Lord Julius and with Emanuel, but they at once spoke of other things. You see how frankly I am telling you everything; that is because you make me feel so wonderfully at home. But perhaps you do not like to talk about her, either."

She smiled pleasantly enough in comment upon his faltering conclusion. "Oh, I think you exaggerate the conspiracy of silence," she answered. "Neither Lord Julius nor Emanuel has anything hostile to say about Edith Cressage, but she doesn't quite appeal to their imagination, and so they find nothing of any sort to say. But it is only fair to remember that they are both men with peculiar and exacting standards for women. They would be equally silent about a hundred other ladies of unblemished character, and of beauty and wit untold. It is nothing at all against her that she hasn't excited their enthusiasm. I do not know her at all well, but I think she is very nice. Now—is that what you wanted me to say?"

The mild note of banter which informed her words put Christian if possible even more at his ease. He stood up, with his hands in the sleek pockets of his new coat, and bent down upon her a joyous smile.

"No, ever so much more!" he insisted,

gaily. "She is very beautiful; she has the air and the distinction of a grande dame; she speaks like a flute, and what she says is clever and apropos; she is unhappy, and yet with no bitterness toward any one; she seemed to like me very much, and, mind you, she was the first fine lady whom I had ever met. Enfin, she is my cousin, and the fact impresses me. What is more natural than that I should be eager to know all about her?"

Kathleen did not respond readily to his mood. She knitted her brows slightly once more, and looked away from him toward the window. "It is rather hard for me to explain," she began at last, doubtfully. "From a good many points of view—her own included—I dare say we do her an injustice. Don't misunderstand me; we are all sorry for her—and I for one have my moments of doubt whether we oughtn't to be something more than sorry."

"Yes, that is the phrase," put in Christian, strenuously. "I think that I myself am something more than sorry for her."

She looked up at him, at first with a shadow of apprehension in her eyes. Then she estimated aright his enthusiasm with a gentle smile. "I will explain as well as I can," she said, softly. "As you say, you

are entitled to be told. The feeling, then, is—I am speaking of Lord Julius and Emanuel, and more or less of myself too—the feeling is that she ought not to have made the marriage she did. Everybody knew that the young man she married was a worthless creature—a violent, ignorant, low-minded fellow. You could not see him, much less talk with him, without recognizing this. One knows perfectly well that she must have hated the very thought of him as a lover or a companion. But he is the heir to a dukedom, and so she marries him. You see what I mean; it seemed an unpleasant thing to us."

Christian considered with a puzzled air the situation thus defined. "But," he commented, with hesitation, "it is the métier of a young woman to get a husband, and to get the best one for herself that she can. If she is so beautiful that a man wishes to make her a duchess, why, that is her triumph. Would you have her forego it? And if she says 'no', why, then the next one he asks says 'yes'—and it is merely that the first one has waived her place in the queue for another. The queue remains the same. And if this were not so, why, then, young men who are not very good, they would get no wives at all. But," he added, in extenu

ation of his dissent, "all these matters are so differently regarded, you know, in France."

She did not look altogether pleased with him. "I thought you would have caught my meaning more readily," she said, "despite your Continental point of view. For that matter, it is the common English point of view also. There is a matrimonial market, of course, and girls offer themselves in it to the highest bidder, and nothing that we can do will change it. But at least we are free to think what we like of the wretched business—and to hold our own opinions of the people who traffic in it."

Kathleen had stated her position with a certain argumentative warmth, which gave her tone a novel effect of reproof. The sight now of the young man's saddened and surprised expression sent her mood up with a rebound. She put a hand on his arm, as he stood before her, and reassured him by a kindly laugh. "Ah, now," she said, with genial pleading in her soft voice, "don't be making a mountain of my molehill. I only wanted you to understand how we felt. And as I have told you, we have our reservations about even that feeling. The poor girl did only what she was expected to do—what her mother and her family and all the friends that surrounded her took it quite as

a matter of course that she should do. Probably she never once encountered the opinion that she should do otherwise. No doubt that is to be said for her. In fact, I should never have dreamed of blaming her to you, if you had not pressed me. And after it's all said and done, you may take it from me that perhaps I don't blame her so very much. She was poor, and not over comfortable at home, I think, and she was very young, and people ran after her to an extraordinary extent—and to be the beauty of the season in London is enough to turn any one's head. Poor creature—it's bitterly enough she's paid for her whistle!"

He smiled down into her eyes. "That is how I knew you would end by speaking of her," he said. "It is in that same way that she moves me—by my compassion. And this is my fancy"—he began, in a more vivacious tone—"I should like to tell it to you—it seems that I am to have the power to do so many such wonderful things—well, then, nothing would delight me more than to be very good to her. It is my *fantaisie*—and there is no harm in it, *is* there?—to atone to her for some of the unhappiness she has suffered. I have thought about it much since I left Caermere. It seems that it would be a good thing for me to do—like an

act of piety. You must remember—she was the first lady who spoke kindly to me in England. And I think you will be pleased with me for being grateful. But, of course, if Emanuel tells me 'no'——"

"Oh, no one will tell you 'no,'" she assured him, rising as she spoke, and looking into his face with beaming eyes. "It is the kind of spirit we like in you. Never imagine that we will be obstacles in its way. Only be on your guard against the soft heart running away with you. The world is full of clever and adroit people who practice upon innocent generosity. It is not so much the worth of what they wheedle from you, as the shock of your discovery of their tricks. That hurts a young nature, and very often callouses and hardens it. But here I am, lecturing you again!"

Christian had not, in truth, been following her remarks with complete attention. Something had come up in his mind, which by the time she stopped he seemed to have turned over and over, and examined from many standpoints, and finally decided to speak about.

"I was not wholly exact," he began, with constraint, "when I said that Lady Cressage was the first lady who spoke kindly to me in England. I mentioned it to Lord Julius—

there was a very charming and good young lady who traveled with me from Rouen, and crossed on the boat—and it is a very curious thing, but when we became acquainted, and I hinted to her about my story, she knew who I was. Indeed, it was she who told me who I was. I had the whole wonderful tale from her—and the kindness and sweet sympathy with which she told it to me, a little at a time—ah, that is what I will never forget! I am bound to remember her with gratitude all my life. And that is another *fantaisie* of mine—that I shall do something good for her. Oh, she has no selfish thoughts! She would not even tell me her name!"

Kathleen's comment was prefaced by a mirthful chuckle. "I can't deny that gratitude is a very active and resourceful element in your composition," she declared, and laughed again. "Oh, we'll advertise for her. How would this do: 'The young lady who meets returning lost heirs to the British nobility at Rouen, and lets them down easily'? Or we might——"

"Ah," Christian interrupted, pleadingly, "I am really very sincere about her. You cannot imagine anything finer or more delicate than her character. And besides,"—he added this with visible reluctance—"I have learned since who she is. Lady Cressage

told me. She is the sister of the lady you call Cora—the wife of that young man Edward—but she is not an actress! It is not in the least her *type!* She earns her own living—she has some work to do—I think it is with a writing-machine—that is, a type-writer, n'est-ce pas?"

Mrs. Emanuel did not immediately reply, but moved to the window, looked out and then walked slowly back to where he stood. "I am not going to suggest an unkind thought about this girl," she said, deliberately. "I would not want you to think differently of her, or of the grateful impulse you have toward her. Indeed, I have heard something of her—and it is much to her credit. But—this sounds a mean thing to say, and yet it has its important true side—people should stick to their class. Bear that always in mind. There seem to be brilliant exceptions to the rule, whenever we look about us—but just the same, the rule exists. But—now I *will* stop, once for all!" She mused at him, with a twinkling eye. "You poor lad, there's something about you that draws down lectures as a lightning-rod draws electricity. And here's the trap!"

When Emanuel returned from London a few days later, to report that his young cousin had been comfortably installed in

chambers on Duke Street, St. James's, and seemed to get on capitally with Lord Lingfield, who was showing him the ropes, Kathleen received the news with less than her accustomed cheerfulness.

"I haven't been quite happy, thinking of him alone in London," she admitted, in the course of their conversation. "I feel, somehow, as if we should have gone up, and taken a house for the winter."

"Ah, but, sweetheart," he urged, almost reproachfully, "you see how I am up to my eyes in all sorts of work. This is really about the most trying and ticklish stage we have gone through yet. If the fibrous silk processes are what is claimed for them, and your girls display the aptitude that you count upon——"

But Kathleen for once seemed not to listen. She had turned, and moved a few steps listlessly away. She took a flower from a vase, picked it to pieces and gazed in a brown study at the meaningless fragments.

"Yes, I know," she remarked at last, with a half sigh. Then she threw the petals into the grate, and, with a decisive little shake of head and shoulders, wheeled round, and came smilingly to her husband.

"And whom did you see in town?" she asked.

PART III

CHAPTER XIII

Toward the end of April, there came an afternoon on which Christian seemed to himself to wake up of a sudden as from a harassed sleep.

He had been in England for over six months, when all at once he became conscious of this queer sensation: the experiences of his half year put themselves together before his mental eye in the aspect of a finished volume—of something definitely over and done with.

There was warm spring in the London air, and at first the vague feeling of unrest impressed him as a part of the general vernal effect. The device of taking a stroll through the parks, to note the early flowers and the wonderful infancy of leafage among the trees, seemed at the outset to fit this new mood that was upon him. Then abruptly he wearied of nature and turned

his back upon it, driving in a hansom to his club. Here there was no one whom he knew, or at least cared to speak with. He sat for a time in the billiard-room, watching with profound inattention the progress of a game he knew nothing about. From this he wandered into the library, where some fierce-faced old gentlemen slept peacefully in armchairs about the alcoves. The sound of their breathing vexed him; he pretended to himself that otherwise he would have found solace in a book. The whim seized him to go home to his chambers, and have tea there comfortably in gown and slippers, and finish a novel Lady Milly Poynes had induced him to begin weeks before.

Once in his own easy-chair, the romance lying opened beside him, he put back his head, stretched his feet and yawned. He left untasted the tea which Falkner brought in; with fingers interlaced behind his neck he stared up at the blue of the sky through his window in formless rumination.

His earlier glimpses of London were dim enough memories now. The town had been described by his cousin Lingfield as empty when he arrived, and after a few days of desultory sight-seeing, he had been carried off to the earl of Chobham's place in

Derbyshire. Here, among people who behaved like kindly kinsmen to the young new-comer, yet failed to arouse much interest in his mind, he learned to shoot well enough to escape open protests by the autocratic head gamekeeper, and to keep his seat in the saddle after a fashion of his own. These acquirements stood him in good stead at the four or five other country houses to which the amiable Lingfield in due course led him. Without them, meager as they were, he would have been in a sorry plight indeed. They provided him with a certain semblance of justification for his presence among people who seemed incapable of amusing themselves or their guests in any other way. There were always ladies, it was true, and it was generally manifest to him that he might spend his time with them if he chose, but after a few tentative experiments he fell back upon the conviction that he did not know how to talk to English ladies. He drifted somehow through these months of hospitable entertainment, feeling that he had never known before what loneliness could mean.

When, at Christmas, he went to spend another fortnight with Emanuel, he had it in his heart to confess to disappointment, and even depression. He had not thus far

fitted at all into the place which had been prepared for him, and he looked forward, with wistful eagerness, as he journeyed westward, to the balm of sympathy and tender comprehension with which Kathleen and Emanuel, dear people that they were, would soothe and heal his wounded self-consciousness. Somehow, the opportunity of unburdening his troubled mind, however, did not come to him. There were other guests, including Lord Julius, and such exceptional attention was devoted on the estates to elaborating the holiday festivities of the various villages, that no individual could hope to secure consideration for his own private emotions. It was sometimes suspected that Emanuel made so much of Christmas in his System, unconsciously no doubt, because the Jewish side of him felt the need of ostentation in its disavowal of theological prejudices. For whatever reason, the festival was observed here in a remarkable spirit. The little churches were embowered in holly and mistletoe, and were the scenes of numerous ornate services. There were processions, merry-makings, midnight visitatons of the "waits," concerts and dances throughout the week, and only the strictly necessary work of the community was performed meanwhile. On New Year's

Day the rejoicings culminated in a children's carnival from one end of the property to the other, with big trees laden with lights and gifts in the German fashion, and exhibitions of the magic lantern, and other juvenile delights. The fortnight passed, and Christian returned to London, as has been said, without having anything like the intimate talk he had expected. Both Kathleen and Emanuel had seemed pleased with him; they had noted with approving comment his progress in the use of idiomatic English, and his rapid assimilation of the manners and bearing of those about him; they had heard none but welcome reports of him from outside, and made clear to him their gratification at the fact. Their smile for him was as affectionate, their display of pleasure in his presence as marked, as ever, but he had the sense, none the less, of something altered. Lord Julius bore him company on his journey to London, and after a brief halt, took him away again for another fortnight, this time at Brighton. He was no more successful with the father, in the matter of helpful confidences, than he had been with the son. It was impossible to tell the strong, big, redoubtable old gentleman of what he felt to be his weaknesses. A kind of desponding pride possessed him, and

closed his lips. He was not happy, as he had supposed he would be, and he could not bring himself to feel that at any point the fault was his. It was the position that was incongruous. Yet how could he complain, or avow his discontent, without seeming an ingrate to the benefactors whose heart had been in the work of shaping and gilding that position for him?

Parliament met this year in January, and Christian saw now a London which he had not imagined to himself—for which nothing, indeed, had prepared him. There came all at once a great many invitations, and the young man, surprised and not a little dismayed, called Lord Lingfield to his assistance. The prospect unfolded to him by this accomplished professor of the proprieties was terrifying enough. At the end of a week Christian cried out that the reality was too much. But Lingfield could see no alternative to going on. "You will get used to it soon enough, now that you have once taken the plunge," he assured him. "There are certain things that a fellow has to do, you know, when he's in London in the season, or even now, in what you may call the half season, unless he's going to chuck the thing altogether." Christian replied with excitement that this was precisely what

he wished to do. In his own mind he had already reached the point of debating whether he could honorably go on using the money placed to his credit at the bank, most of which was still there, if he fled from London, and even England.

Lord Lingfield was a fine young man, irreproachable in attire and manners, who expected to do something in politics, and who regarded his duty both to the future which he hoped to create for himself, and to the immediate present which had been created for him, with conscientious gravity. He had never thought of lightening or evading the tasks set before him; he had no perception whatever of the possibility of making such things easier for others. He assured Christian with gentle solemnity that desertion was not to be mentioned, and that even mitigation was undesirable. "It has all been arranged for you," he urged. "Upon my word, you are very lucky. You have been to two houses already where I never get asked except to luncheon, and here is a card here which I could hardly believe my eyes to see To trifle with such chances would be simple madness. You will get to have all London at your fingers' ends, your very first season. Such a start as you're likely to have, I've never seen in

my life. My dear fellow—you don't understand what it means."

"But I'm tired to death!" groaned Christian. "No doubt they are excellent people, but they weary me to the bone. The dinners, the calls, the receptions, the dances—I have no talent whatever for these things. It is very kind of these people—but I know I am ridiculous in it all. I give them no pleasure, and God knows I receive none. Then why must it go on? For whose benefit is it? I swear to you, I would not mind the labor and fatigue, if it was any good that I was doing. Emanuel, for example, toils like a slave, but then his work has great results. But this of mine——!"

"Ah, yes," interposed Lingfield, smilingly. "But Emanuel could never have made much running in London. He disputes with people too much, don't you know. They don't like that. And I think you make much too hard work of it all. There's no need for *you* to talk, you know. It isn't expected of you. And I don't see why you can't move quietly along, going everywhere, being seen at the right places, and being civil to everybody, and not worry yourself at all. That's what you need, my dear boy—repose! Let the other people do the worry. Now, of course, in a case like Dicky West-

land's it's different. He has to be amusing and useful, or he wouldn't get asked. But you are not on all fours with him at all. To tell the truth—no doubt it'll sound strange to you, but it is the truth all the same—it's better form for you not to be amusing, or brilliant, or that sort of thing. Fellows in your place don't go in for it, you know."

Christian sighed, and chafing at the necessity of submission, still submitted.

Now, as he lay back in his chair, the retrospect was augmented by six other weeks, in which he had passively yielded to what Lingfield had assured him was the inevitable. He had dined out almost every-night, and had made countless calls. It seemed to him that he must have met everybody in this huge metropolis who had a pair of shoulders or possessed a dress coat. He yawned at the thought of them.

Was he not himself to blame for this? At Christmas time he had been quite confident in answering "no" to this question; now he did not feel so sure about it. At one place or another he had come into contact with most of the members of the government, and with many of those distinguished statesmen on the opposite bench who, by the grace of the genial British electorate, would

be ministers next time. He had talked with eminent artists, eminent scientists, eminent writers, eminent soldiers and sailors, and watched them and listened to them as they sat over their cigars, or moved about among the ladies in the drawing-rooms. Hostesses whose cordial good will toward him seemed equaled only by their capable control over others, had said to him time and time again: "If there is any one you want to know, tell me." The phrase lingered in his mind as a symbol of his position. He had merely to mention his wish, like some lucky person of the fables who possessed a talisman. It could not be said that he had used his magic power foolishly or perversely. He had followed in dutiful, painstaking solicitude the path marked out for him by his advisers. He had done the best that was in him to do; he had gone wherever Lingfield bade him go; he had loyally kept awake late at night; he had smiled and bowed and spoken affable words; he had fulfilled punctually all the engagements imposed upon him. What was more, he could no longer pretend that he made a failure of the thing; it was known to him that he had created a pleasant impression upon London, and that people liked him.

For all that, he could not feel that in turn

he liked these people. Among those of whom he had seen the most, was there any whom he profoundly desired ever to see again? He passed some random figures in mental review, and suffered them to vanish without thrusting forth any tentacle of thought to detain them. They had not entered his real life; they meant nothing to him. Positively he was as much alone in London to-day as he had been when he first set foot in it. Indeed, was he not the poorer to-day by all those lost illusions and joyous, ardent hopes now faded to nothingness? In return for these departed treasures, he had only empty hands to show—and a jaded, futilely mutinous, empty mind as well.

The soft, equable tinkle of the door-bell caught his ear, but scarcely arrested his attention. Perhaps unconsciously the sound served to polarize his thoughts, for suddenly it became apparent to him that he was in revolt. All this intolerable social labor was ended for him—definitely and irrevocably ended. He would not dine at another house; he would burn forthwith his basket of cards, and the little book with its foolish record of ladies' days "at home."

He sat up and sipped at his lukewarm tea, with the glow of a new resolve on his face.

Falkner—a smooth-mannered, assiduous, likable man of middle age whom Emanuel had given him from his own household—entered the room to announce a caller. A brisk, alert tread on the polished hall floor behind him cut into his words, so that Christian did not catch them. He rose, and looked inquiringly.

For an instant, he felt that he was not glad to see the person who came in. It was a young man of about his age, tall and fair, and handsome in a buoyant, bright-faced way of his own. His blue eyes sparkled cheerfully into Christian's doubtful glance, and he held out a hand as he advanced. Everybody in the world called him Dicky Westland, and for this opening moment Christian thought of him as preëminently typical of all the vanities and artificialities he was on the point of forswearing.

"Not seedy, I hope?" the new-comer said in comment upon the other's loose attire—and perhaps upon his dubious countenance as well. His voice had a musical vivacity in it which seemed to lighten the room. Christian, as he took the hand and shook his head, smiled a little. It began to occur to him that really he did like this young man.

"No," he replied, with a gesture toward a chair. "I'm all right. Only the whim

seized me—to come home and read a book. I got homesick, I think."

This statement, once in the air, seemed funny to the young men, and Dicky Westland laughed aloud. Christian, sitting down opposite his visitor, felt himself sharing his animation. "It was good of you to come," he declared, with a refreshed tone. "The truth is, I'm tired out. I am up too late. I run about too much."

"Yes, a fellow does get hipped," assented Dicky. "But you are so tremendously regular, it doesn't do you any harm. A days' rest now and then, and you're right as a trivet again."

"Regular," Christian repeated, musingly. He formed his lips to utter some reflection upon the theme, and then closed them again. "Will you have a cup of tea?" he asked, with the air of thinking of something else.

The other shook his head, and preserved a posture of vivacious anticipation, as if Christian had made a literal promise to unburden his mind. The suggestion was so complete that Christian accepted it as a mandate.

"I am glad you came," he said, "because —well, because I have come to a conclusion in my mind, and I should like to put it into words for you—so that I can also hear it my-

self. I am resolved to go away—to leave London."

Dicky lifted his brows in puzzled interrogation. "How do you mean?" he asked.

"I do not like it," Christian replied, speaking more readily now, and enforcing his words with eager hands. Lingfield had cautioned him against this gesticulatory tendency, but the very consciousness that he was in rebellion brought his hands upward into the conversation. "It is not what I care for. I come into it too late, no doubt, to understand—appreciate it, properly. The people I meet—I have no feeling for them. It seems a waste of my time to sit with them, to stand and talk, to go about from one of their houses to another. At the end of it all, there is nothing. They have all thick shells on, and they are not going to let me get inside of them. And, moreover, if I did get inside, who can be sure there would be anything of value there? It does not often look so to me, from the outside. But it is a waste of time and labor, and it does not amuse me in the least, and why should I pursue it?"

"Quite right!" said Dicky.

"Then you agree with me?—you approve?" asked Christian, not concealing his surprise.

"Of course I do. It's awful rot," the other affirmed. He observed his host silently for a space, and meanwhile, by a quite visible process, the familiar external elasticity, not to say flippancy, of his manner seemed to fall away from him. "With me, of course," he went on, almost gravely, "I have to do it. I must get my secretaryship, or I can't live. My relations could put me into the swim, but they can't support me there indefinitely. I have only two aunts, you know—dear old things, they are—and they keep me going, but they have only life interests, and I fancy they have to scrape a little as it is.

"So you see," pursued Dicky Westland, "I must help myself, and it's only by knowing the right people, and being seen at the right places, that a fellow can bring anything off. For example, now: Lady Winsey is a distant cousin of mine, and she's promised the aunts, you know, and there's an old Sir Hogface Something-or-Other dodging about the place, who's going to get a West Indian governorship in May, and Lady Winsey has not only had him at her house to dinner, where he could see me, but has contrived to throw me at him at three other houses. Next week I'm to go down to a closing meet in Berkshire, just because he's to be there—

and that she arranged, too. And it's all to get a place worth perhaps three hundred a year, with yellow fever thrown in—if it comes to anything at all."

"Three hundred a year," commented Christian, knitting his brows. "I still make pounds into francs to know what a sum means," he explained, smilingly, after a moment. "Once I would have thought that a great fortune—and only a few months ago, too, at that."

"Well, you see how it is," said Dicky. "I mustn't let any chance slip by. But if I stood in your shoes, dear God! how I would chuck it all!"

"But what would you do instead?" Christian propounded this question sitting back in his chair, with the tips of his fingers joined, and a calm twinkle in his eye. He discovered himself feeling as if it were his companion who had made confessions and craved sympathy.

Dicky looked into his hat, and pouted his lips in whimsical indecision. "What I mean is," he explained at last—"my point was this—I hate the whole thing, and if I didn't have to do it, why then I wouldn't do it, d'ye see? I'd go about with nobody except the people I really cared about—my right-down, intimate friends. That's the idea."

"Ah—friends!" said Christian. "That is the word that sings in my ears!"

He rose impulsively, and began walking about the room with a restless step. Now and again he halted briefly to look down upon his companion, to enforce with eyes as well as gesture some special thing in his talk. "Yes, friends!" he cried. "Tell me, you Dicky Westland, where are friends to be found? Have you some, perhaps? Then where did you come upon them? It is what I should like very much to know. Listen to me! I have been in England six months. I possess in England, say two—three—no, five friends—and all these came to me in my first week here. All but one belong to my family, so they were here, ready-made for me. But since that time, now that I am for myself, I have not gained one friend. Is there then something strange—what do I say—forbidding in me? Or no—it is nonsense for me to say that. It is the other way about. I have seen nobody who awakened voices within me. There has been no one who appealed to me as a friend should appeal. I live among a thousand rich and fine people who are as good to me as they know how to be—and yet I am as if I lived in a desert. And it is very cold—and lonely—and heartbreaking in this desert of mine!"

Westland looked at him, as he stood now in the pathetic abandonment of his peroration, with a contemplative squint in one eye.

"I see what you mean," he remarked finally. "You've been looking for flesh and blood, and you find only gun-metal." He thrust out his lips a little, and gave further consideration to the problem. "There isn't any need for you to go away, you know," he added after a pause. "You can have any kind of life you like in London. It is all here, if you want it. But what is it that you do want?"

Christian threw himself sidewise into his chair, and bent his head with a sigh. Then, with a new light in his eyes, he looked up. "You yourself said it"—he exclaimed—"to see only my true friends. That is my idea of life: To have a small circle of people whom I love very much, and to make constant opportunities to be with some of them —talking as we like to talk, going about together, making life happy for one another as we go along. All my youth, I envied rich people, because I thought that they used their wealth to command this greatest of delights. I imagined that if one had much money, then one could afford to spend his time only with his close, dear friends. But what I discover is that they do something

entirely different. They seem not to let friendship come into their lives at all. They desire only acquaintances, and of these the more they have the better, if they bear the proper cachet."

"It is the women," said Dicky, sententiously. "They like the crowd, and the new faces. And what they like, of course they have. They run the whole show."

Christian nodded comprehension — then put out a hand to signalize a reservation. "I know women—here in England—who have a higher idea than this," he declared, softly.

"Of course, so we all do," assented Westland. "There are a million splendid women, if one could only get at them. But it's a sort of trades union, don't you know. You don't take the workmen you want, on your own terms; you take those the society gives you, and the terms are arranged for you. It's like that with women. You meet some awfully jolly girls now and then, but they are not in the least degree their own masters. If you try to get to know them well, either they're frightened, and pull back into their shells, or you're headed off by their mothers. But," he added upon reflection—"of course it's different with you."

"At least I am not interested," said Chris-

tian, wearily. The advice of Kathleen had produced upon his mind an even greater effect, perhaps, than he imagined. He had encountered, by the dozen, extremely beautiful and engaging girls, whose charm should have been enhanced in his eyes by the dignity and even grandeur of their surroundings. But an impalpable yet efficient barrier had stood always between them and him. If they exhibited reserve, he was too shy for words. If they expanded toward him with smiles or any freedom of demeanor, he recalled instantly the warning of Emanuel's wife, and that was fatal. "I have not cared for any of them," he reaffirmed.

"Oh!" cried Westland of a sudden, his comely, boyish face beaming with the thought that had come to him. "How stupid of me! I'd forgotten what I came for—and I'm not sure it doesn't precisely fill the bill. Are you doing anything to-night? Will you come with me to the Hanover Theater at midnight? It's the five-hundredth performance of 'Pansy Blossoms'—and there's to be supper on the stage and a dance. I don't think you've seen much of that sort of thing, have you?"

Christian shook his head, and regarded his companion doubtfully. "Nothing at all of it," he said, slowly. "But it does not attract

me very much, I'm afraid. You would better take some one else. I should be a fish out of water there. The people of the theaters—they are not congenial to me—that is, I do not think they would be."

"But, hang it all, man, how do you know till you've tried?" Dicky put a little worldly authority into his tone as he proceeded. "You mustn't mind my saying it to you—it is you who make your own desert, as you call it, for yourself. If you say in advance that you know you won't like this sort of person, or that, how are you ever going to form any friendships?"

Christian received the remonstrance with meekness. "You do not quite understand me," he said, amiably enough. "I have some work to do in the world, and I don't think that actresses and actors would help me much to do it. The young men who run after them do not seem, somehow, to do much else. It is only a prejudice I have; it applies only to myself. If others feel differently, why, I have not a word to say."

"No, you must come!" Westland declared, rising. "It's nonsense for you not to see that side of things. My dear fellow, it's as respectable as the Royal Academy—or Madame Tussaud's. Are you dining any-

where? Then I'll run home and dress, and I'll drive round here for you. We'll dine together, and then look in at some of the halls. Shall I say seven? It gives us more time over our dinner."

Christian accepted, with a rueful little smile, his committal to the enterprise. "You must not mind if I come away early," he said, getting to his feet in turn.

The other laughed at him. "My dear man, you'll never want to come away at all. But no, seriously—it's just the kind of thing you want. It'll amuse you, for one thing—and deuce take it, you'll be young only once in your life. But more than that—here you are swearing that you'll do no more social work at all, and you don't know in the least what other resources are open to you. It isn't alone actresses that you meet at a place like this, but all sorts of clever people who know how to get what there is out of life. That is what you yourself want to do, isn't it? Well, it'll do you no harm, to say the least, to see how they go about it."

"Very likely," Christian replied, as the other turned. "I will be ready at seven."

He followed him to the door, and into the hallway. "Mind," he said, half jokingly, half gravely, as he leaned over the banister, "I have not altogether promised. When

midnight comes, I may lose my courage altogether."

"Ah, it's that kind of timidity that storms every fortress in its path," Dicky called up to him from the stairway.

CHAPTER XIV

The two young men dined at the Café Royal. "It's as good a kitchen as there is in London, and in the matter of people it isn't such a tiresome repetition of those one meets everywhere else as Willis's or the Prince's. To see the same shoulders and the same necks, night after night—a fellow gets tired of it."

To this explanation by Dicky of his choice, as they rolled forward in their hansom, Christian made no direct response. After a little he said: "Very soon now, I am going to do something that seems to have been in my mind for months. Perhaps I have only thought of it since this afternoon: I cannot be sure. But I am going to do it—I am going to know for myself what the real London and the real England are like. A thousand gentlemen in black clothes and silk hats, a thousand ladies with low-cut dresses and feathers in their hair—all thinking and talking about themselves and their own little affairs—that does not mean London. And a few large houses in the country, where these

same people spend a few months riding after the hounds and shooting tame birds and wearying each other with idle, sleepy talk—that does not represent England."

"Doesn't it!" cried Westland. "I should say that's just what it did, worse luck!"

"No, no!" protested Christian. "I don't want to be told that it does—for then I should want to go away altogether. No—there is the other thing, and I am going to find it out, and see it and know it. When all those years of my boyhood and youth I was so proud of being an Englishman, it was not this empty, valueless life of the West End, or the chase of foxes and birds in the country, that I longed for, and nourished pride in."

"Oh, but they do other things, you know," laughed Dicky. "They are in Parliament, some of them, or they are at the bar, or in the Services, or they manage estates or are directors in companies, and that sort of thing. And some of them go in a lot for charities, and work on committees and organize things, you know. You'd hardly believe how much of that most of the women let themselves in for."

"That is not what I mean," said the other, rather abruptly. "To me all that is not worth the snap of a finger," and he empha-

sized his words by a gesture with the hand which rested on the door of the hansom.

At an advanced stage of the dinner, the young men came to the subject again. In reply to a random inquiry Christian said that his grandfather, the duke, as far as he knew, was neither worse nor better in health than he had been all winter. "I have not been to Caermere since my first visit," he went on. "I am really living upon a programme arranged for me, I should think, by a committee of my relations. Lord Lingfield is my active bear-leader. He conducts me, or sends me, wherever it has been decided that I shall go. It was not deemed important that I should go to Caermere again—and so I have not gone. Voilà tout! If I had been free to myself, I think I should have gone."

"It must be an awfully jolly place, from the pictures I've seen of it," said Westland.

"Jolly!" cried Christian. "My dear creature, it is a grave, a mausoleum, a place of skulls and dead men's bones! You have never seen such a family vault in all your days. When I even begin to think of undertaking the task of brightening it into life again, I grow dizzy. The immensity of the work unnerves me. And now I do not know if I shall ever put my hand to it. The country-gentleman idea—which you make so

much of in England—it does not appeal to me. It is too idle—too purposeless. Of course my cousin Emanuel, he makes a terrible toil of it—and does some wonderful things, beyond doubt. But after all, what does it come to? He helps people to be extremely fine who without him would only be tolerably fine. But I have the feeling that one should help those who are not fine at all—who have never had the chance to be fine, who do not know what it means. Emanuel's wife—oh, a very lovely character—she said to me that they disliked coming up to town, the sight of the London poor distressed them so much. Well, that is the point—if I am to help anybody at all, it is the London poor that I should try to help. Emanuel's plan is to give extra bones, and teach new tricks, to dogs already very comfortable. My heart warms to the dogs without collars, the homeless and hungry devils who look for bones in the gutters."

"Oh, you're going in for settlements and that sort of thing," commented Dicky. "I hear that is rather disappointing work. If you don't take the sporting papers at the reading-room they say the men won't come at all. Slingsby Chetwynd was awfully keen on the thing. He went down to stop a whole week—at Shoreditch or Houndsditch or the

Isle of Dogs, or somewhere like that—and a woman smashed his hat in, and he fell into a cellar—and he was jolly glad to get back again the same night."

Christian was pursuing thoughts of his own. The wine was admirable—as indeed it should have been considering the pains Dicky had been at, with pursed lips and lifted eyebrows, in the selection of it—and Christian had found an unaccustomed pleasure in its aromatic, sub-acid taste. He had drunk rather freely of it, and was satisfied with himself for having done so. He leaned back in his chair now, and watching the golden fountain of bubbles forever streaming upward in his glass, mused upon welcome new impulses within him toward the life of a free man.

"None the less," he remarked, indifferent to the irrelevancy of his theme, "I should have liked to go to Caermere during the winter. I am annoyed with myself now that I did not go—whether it was arranged for me or not. There is a lady there for whom I felt great sympathy. I had expected to be of service to her long before this—but I am of service to no one. She is a cousin—no doubt you know her—Lady Cressage."

"But she is in London," put in Westland. "I only know her a little, but Lady Selton

used to be by way of seeing a good deal of her. She told me last week that she was in town—taken a little flat somewhere—Victoria Street way, I think. She doesn't go in for being very smart, you know. Why—yes—of course she's your cousin by marriage. Awfully pretty woman she was. Gad! how well I remember her season! All the fellows went quite off their heads. How funny—that she should be your cousin!"

Christian took no note of his companion's closing words, or of the tone in which they had been uttered. He scowled at the playful bubbles in his glass, as he reflected that the news of her arrival in London ought not to have come to him in this roundabout, accidental way. Why did none of his own people tell him? Or still more to the point, why had not she herself told him? He really had given her only an occasional and sporadic thought, during these past four or five months. Now, as he frowned at his wine, it seemed to him that his whole winter had been burdened with solicitude for her. Or no, "burdened" was an ungracious word, and false to boot. He would say "mellowed" or "enriched" instead.

"You must find out for me"—he began, and then, upon a second thought born of pique, checked himself. "Or do not mind—

it is of no consequence. I shall hear as a matter of course." He called for the bill with a decision in his voice which seemed full of warning that the topic was exhausted.

Westland could not help observing the fat roll of crackling white notes which the other drew from his pocket. If they were all of the smallest denomination, they must still represent something like his whole year's allowance. The general understanding that Christian's unfamiliarity with English ways excused, and even invited, wise admonition from his friends, prompted him to speak.

"That's rather a lot to carry about with you, old man," he said, in gentle expostulation.

"Oh, I like it!" Christian declared, with shining eyes. He snapped the elastic band about the roll, with an air of boyish delight in the sound, as he returned it to his pocket. "If you knew the years in which I counted my sous!"

It was nearly ten o'clock when they left. Beginning with the Pavilion, they went to four or five music halls, only to find that there were no seats to be had. "Why, of course it's the boat-race," exclaimed Dicky at last. "Stupid of me to have forgotten it. I say, I ought to have come for you this morning, and taken you up the river to see

it. It's worth seeing—for once. I wonder Lingfield did not arrange it for you."

"Oh, several people asked me to join their parties," Christian replied. "But it did not attract me. The athletics here—they rather annoy me. It is as if people thought of nothing else. And to have students at the universities consumed with the idea—that is specially unpleasant to my mind. You must remember—I am a teacher by profession."

"We'll go back to the Empire," Westland decided. "Ever been there? Well, it's worth seeing, too—perhaps more than once. The Johnnies 'll be out in extraordinary force, I'm afraid, but then you ought to see them too, I suppose. It takes all sorts to make a world—and the world is what you've come out to look at. Let me get the tickets—or, well, if you insist—ask for the promenade."

It was indeed a novel spectacle, which smote and confused his eyes, rather than revealed itself to them, when Christian found himself inside. The broad, low, rounded promenade was so crowded with people that at first sight walking about seemed wholly impracticable, but Dicky stepped confidently into the jumbled throng and began moving through it, apparently with ease, and the other followed him. They made their way to the end, where a man in

uniform guarded a staircase; then, turning, they elbowed along back to the opposite end of the half-circle. This gained, there was nothing in Dicky's thoughts, seemingly, but to repeat the performance indefinitely. Their progress was of a necessity slow. On the inner side a dense wall of backs and high hats rendered hopeless any notion of seeing the stage below. Christian, struggling after his guide, wondered what else there was to see.

After a time it became obvious to him that the women who formed so large an element of the lazily shifting crowd were also the occasion of its being. They walked about, looking the men in the face with a cold, free, impassive scrutiny upon which, even if he had never seen it before, intuition would have fixed a label for him. Other women, from the plush seats on the outer edge of the circle, bent upon the whole moving mass of promenaders the same stoical, inscrutable gaze. The range of age among them did not seem extended to his uninformed glance. In years they were apparently all about alike. Some, indeed, had fresher faces and smoother skins than others, but when the eyes were considered a certain indefinable equality was insisted upon in them all. Their toilets were often striking in effect,

and especially their hats—exaggerating both in breadth of brim, and in the height and bulk of the edifice of plumes above, the prevalent fashion in such matters—were notable to the spectator; but Christian found himself, upon consideration, more interested in their eyes than in anything else.

A certain stony quality in this stereotyped gaze of theirs suggested a parallel to his memory; he had seen precisely that same cool, unruffled, consciously unconscious stare in princesses who had looked at him without beholding him in the far-away days of his life about the hotels of the Riviera. It was very curious, he thought—this incongruous resemblance. But a little closer analysis showed that the likeness was but partial. These ladies of the promenade could look about them with the imperturbability of princesses, it was true, but only so long as they saw nothing which concerned them immediately. Nay, now he could discern beneath the surface of this passionless perlustration a couched vigilance of attention, which ever and again flashed uppermost with electric swiftness. When this mercurial change came, one saw the temperament mapped out like a landscape under the illumination of lightning. There gleamed forth expectancy, dread, joy,

irritability, fun, dislike or wistful hope—whatever the mood of the instant yielded—with a force of intensity almost startling. Then, as quickly as it came, the look might vanish; even if it flickered on, the briefest interval of repose brought back again the watchful, dispassionate, hardened regard.

"Have you had enough of this?" Dicky asked, with an implication of weariness in his tone.

Christian, halting, took slow and bewildered cognizance of the fact that he had been going from one end of the promenade to the other for a very long time. Insensibly, at some period of the experience, he had taken the lead from his companion, and had been dragging him about in his wake.

"It is very interesting," was the vague excuse he offered to Dicky, and even more to himself.

A sofa just beside them was for the moment unoccupied. Christian seated himself with the air of one physically tired out. "Ought we not to order drinks?" he asked his companion, who stood over him, looking down somewhat doubtfully.

"Oh, dear, no—not here!" Dicky replied, with conviction. "It's nearly closing time—and we'll go over to the club for half an

hour—where we know our tipple. Shall we run along now?"

"No—sit down here," said Christian. He spoke with the authority of a profound emotion, that glowed in his eyes and quivered on his lips. Westland obeyed him, pretending to a nonchalance which his mistrustful glance belied.

"This is all very extraordinary to me," Christian continued, in a low, strenuous voice. He spoke with even more than his wonted fluency. "It catches hold of me. It fills my mind with new thoughts. There is something in the very air here—"

"Musk and cigarette smoke," interposed Dicky, lightly. Then he saw that levity struck a false note.

"Pah!" the other jerked forth, impatiently. "Don't talk like that! It is the most terrible, the most touching, the most inspiring thing I have seen in my life. I breathe in a new ambition here, out of this atmosphere. We were talking of the London poor. I thought they made the loudest appeal—but they are nothing beside *this!*" He spread his thin, nervous hand out as he spoke, and swept it in a comprehensive gesture over the spectacle before them. "These are my sisters—my unhappy and dishonored sisters, scorned and scornful—oh, yes, they are all my sisters!"

"But fortunately they don't know it," urged Dicky, surveying the ladies with pouting lips and half-closed eyes. "For God's sake, don't mention it to them."

Christian turned round, with one knee on the sofa, and claimed his companion's attention. "I wanted to be able to add you to my very little list of friends," he said, gravely. "All the evening I have had that in my mind—and it may be something else, too. But if you cannot understand me, now, when I tell you how all this moves me—and if you only care to mock at what I say—why, then, it is not needful to say more."

Dicky faced about in turn, and regarded him with a puzzled glance, from which he was at pains to exclude all signs of frivolity. "But you haven't told me *how* it moves you at all," he said, vaguely.

"Oh, how," repeated Christian with hesitation. "It is not easy to say just how. But I am devoured by a great compassion. I could weep tears at the heart-misery I see here. They shout in the papers and wring their hands over the massacre of Armenians —but right here—this thing—is it not more cruel and dreadful still? Here there is no question of race hatreds and religious hatreds, but just the cold, implacable

pressure of poverty on human souls, crushing them and sinking them in shame."

"Oh, that's only a part of the story—not such a deuce of a big part either," urged the other, gently. "Don't get so excited about it, my dear fellow. It is by no means a new thing. And wait till you know more about it, and have thought it over—and then, if you feel that there is anything you can do, why, take my word for it, it will still be here. It won't disappear in the meanwhile. You'll still be in time."

Christian regarded him wistfully, and with a mild, faint smile. "You would never enter into my feelings about this," he said, softly. "We are made differently. It strikes you as strange, does it not, that a young man, coming into contact with this for the first time, should be filled only with the yearning to help these poor girls, and do good to them? It surprises you? It is something new to you, n'est ce pas?"

Dicky grinned within decorous limits. "My dear boy," he declared, confidentially, "so far from being new, it's the oldest thing in the world. Every young fellow worth his salt that I have ever known, or that anybody's ever known, has swelled himself out with precisely these same reform sentiments. In this very promenade here I have witnessed

at least a dozen attacks like yours. And don't think I am jeering at the thing. It is a very beautiful and generous spirit indeed, and I admire it awfully, I assure you—only—only, as one gets to know his way about a trifle better, he sees that there isn't so much in it as he thought there was. And that's what I was trying to say to you. Don't let your first impulses run away with you. If the subject interests you, appeals to you, very well; get to understand it. You will find that it is more complicated, perhaps, than you think. But when you know it all, why, then you can do what you like."

Some of the light seemed to have been turned out. A definitive blare rolled up from the orchestra below; the throng of promenaders, though still informed by the most leisurely of moods, was converging upon the door of exit. The two young men arose.

Christian suddenly yawned. "I am tired —and depressed," he said, wearily. "I think I will ask you to let me go home."

"Nonsense!" said Dicky, promptly. "We'll go to the club, and get a pick-up, and then you shall see something that won't depress you. I grant you this *is* rather melancholy. God knows why we came."

An hour or more later, emerging from a

confusing sequence of narrow passages and winding ascents and descents, Christian followed Westland out through a groove of painted canvas to the stage of the Hanover Theater.

He had never seen a theater from this point of view, and the first few minutes of his scrutiny—here where he stood at the wings, while Dicky looked after the coats and hats—were full of pleased interest. The huge dusky space of the galleries overhead, strange and formidable in its dark bulk like some giant balloon, was very impressive. By contrast, the stage itself seemed to give out light. A long riband of a table stretched across the back, and down the two sides, and about this clustered many people; shining shirt-fronts and bald heads, pale shimmering dresses and white shoulders, the glitter of napery and plates and glasses—all was radiant under the powerful electric glow from above. He could see now, in the half-shadows down beyond the footlights, two or three rows of heads of people sitting in the front stalls. To his fancy these detached heads appeared to belong to an order of beings quite distinct from those on the stage. He wondered if actors felt their audiences to be thus remote and aloof from themselves.

"We can push our way in at the other end

—there's less of a crush there," he heard Dicky say to him. He followed his guide across the stage, through groups of conversing guests who had brought out their sandwiches and glasses from the throng, and came eventually to the table itself. Some one held out a bottle toward him, and he lifted a glass to be filled. From under some other stranger's arm he extricated a plate, containing something in gelatine, he knew not what. In straightening himself he pushed against a person unexpectedly close behind him.

Half turning, with the murmur of an apology upon his lips, his eyes encountered those of a lady, who seemed to know him, and to be smiling at him.

"How d'ye do?" this lady said to him. There could be no doubt about the cordiality of her tone. Her left hand was occupied with a champagne glass and a fan, but her right was being lifted to him, almost against his breast, in greeting. He gazed at her in smiling perplexity, the while he signed that both his own hands were filled.

"You don't know me from Adam," she said to him, cheerfully. "But I'm your cousin—Cora Torr, you know."

CHAPTER XV

"You've altered so much since I saw you! It was odds against my recognizing you at all," declared Cora, beaming forth into conversation before Christian had fairly grasped the significance of her identity.

"I should never have believed they would make such an Englishman out of you, in just these few months. Let's see—it was October, wasn't it? Yes, of course—the First." She showed her beautiful teeth in a flash of gaiety. "The pheasants weren't the only ones that got hit that day. But bygones are bygones. . . . And how do you like London? How do you find it compares with Paris? I always maintain that there's more real life here, if you know where to look for it. . . . But I am afraid you're not glad to see me."

"There you are wrong. I am glad to see you," Christian replied, with deliberation. He made his words good by thrusting his plate back upon the table and shaking her gloved hand. There was a frank smile in his eyes.

"Get my glass filled again," she suggested —"and your own too—and let's get out of the way. These people push as if they had had nothing to eat since Christmas. Of all the hogs in evening clothes, the stage-supper hog is the worst. Well, and how have you been, all this time?"

They had moved across the stage to the entrance, and paused near it in a little nook of momentary isolation. Christian made conventional answer to her query, and to other remarks of hers calling for no earnest attention, the while he concentrated his thoughts upon the fact that they were actually standing here together, talking like old friends.

It was sufficiently surprising, this fact, but even more remarkable was the satisfaction he himself was getting from it. There was no room for doubt; he really enjoyed being with her. There was no special need to concern himself with what she was saying. She hardly paused for replies, and seemed not to mind in the least the automatic character of the few which came to her. He had only to smile a little, and nod, and let his eyes glow pleasurably, and she went blithely on. The perception came suddenly to him that he had been sorry also for her. Indeed, now that he reflected upon it, had

not hers been the most cruel misfortune of all? The memory of the drawn, agonized mask of a face she had shown, over the tea-table in the conservatory at Caermere, rose in his mind's vision. He looked up at the strips of canvas and lamps above, with half-closed eyes, recalling in reverie the details of this suffering face; then he turned abruptly to confront her, and observe afresh the happy contrast she presented to-night.

Cora was looking away for the instant, and apparently conveying by lifted eyebrows and shakes of the head a message of some sort to some person on the bustling stage unknown to him. He glanced instinctively in the direction of her signal, but gained no information—and indeed realized at once that he was not in search of any. Of course, she knew everybody here, and would be exchanging nods and smiles of recognition all the evening. It occurred to him to wonder if her husband, that Captain Edward of unpleasant memory, was on the stage, but he had the power to put the thought promptly out of his mind. It was only Cora that he was interested in, and that he wanted to talk with. And here she was, once more looking into his face, and restoring by her smile his almost jocund pleasure in the situation.

He still maintained the rôle of listener,

but it grew increasingly clear to him that when his turn came he would have a good deal to say, and that he would say it well. He had never spoken on familiar terms with an actress before—and the experience put him wonderfully at his ease. He felt that he could say things to her; already he delighted in the assurance of her receptivity, her immunity from starched nonsense, her genial and comforting good fellowship. As he continued to look at her, and to smile, he remembered what people always said, or rather took for granted, about ladies on the stage. The consciousness shaped itself within him that she offered a timely and felicitous compromise—a sort of bridge between those formal, "gun-metal" women of society whom he desired never to see again, and those hapless, unblest creatures of the Empire.

Presently she took his arm, and they moved round to the stalls in front, and found seats a little apart from any one else. A large number of young ladies, in white or light-hued evening dresses, were seated about in the rows before them, and Cora pointed out this one and that among them to Christian. "That is Dolly Montressor—the dancer, you know—her photos are all the rage just now. The girl in pink, over there—just turning round

—she is the one who sued young Concannon for breach of promise. You must remember. Her lawyers put the bailiffs in for what she owed them, after they'd taken everything the jury gave her, and she dressed the bailiffs in livery and had them wait at the table at a big supper she gave. The little thick-nosed dark man there—next but one to her—he drew a check for the supper and the bailiffs too. You see the small, thin girl with the tomato-colored hair—she didn't bring *her* suit into court—one isn't fox-headed for nothing. She settled outside at the last minute—the Lord Carmody case, you know—and no one's ever heard a whisper of any supper she ever gave. It isn't at all her line. She puts it all into South Africans; they say she's good for thirty thousand pounds, if she's got a penny. It isn't bad, you know, on a salary of six quid, and only the pantomime season at that. Oh, there's Peggy Wiltshire—just in the doorway. She's the most remarkable woman in England. How old would you think she was? Forty? Why, my dear man, she was billed as a star in the old original Black Crook—just about the time I was born. She can't be a minute under sixty. But look at her—the neck and shoulders of a girl! Isn't it amazing! Why, she was knocking about town when your

father was a youngster—and here she is still going strong."

The tables were being cleared from the stage, and the fringe of gentlemen who remained hungry and thirsty was retiring slowly and with palpable reluctance toward the wings. Some sad-faced musicians emerged wearily from an unsuspected cave beneath the footlights, and exhibited their violins and flutes to the general gaze with an air of profound dejection. Their fiddle strings began to whine at one another, in a perfunctory and bad-tempered groping about for something they were expected to have in common. A stout man on the stage vigorously superintended the removal of the last table, and warned off with a comprehensive gesture the lingering remnant of unsated raveners; then, turning, he lifted his hand. On the instant, some score and more of the young ladies in white and pale pinks and blues and lavenders rose from their front stalls, and moved toward the stage door at the left. They pressed forward like a flock of sheep—and with faces as listlessly vacant as any pasture could afford. Christian observed their mechanical exit with a curling lip.

"If these are the renowned beauties, whose fascinations turn the heads of all the young

men about town," he confided to his companion, "then it says extremely little for the quality of what is inside those heads."

"Yes, isn't it extraordinary!" she mused at him, eyeing the bevy of celebrities with a ruminating glance. "This must be somewhere near the sixth or seventh lot of 'em that even I've seen passing through the turnstile, as you might say. Where do they all come from?—and good heavens! where do they all go to? It's a procession that never stops, you know. You'd think there was a policeman, keeping it moving. You have these girls here—well, they're the queens, just for the minute. They own the earth. Nothing in the world is too good for them. Very well: just behind them are some other girls, a few years younger. Goodness knows where they were to-night—in the back ranks of the ballets, perhaps, or doing their little turn at the Paragon or the Canterbury, or doing nothing at all—nothing but keeping their toes pointed in this direction. And they are treading close on the heels of these queens you see here; and behind *them* are girls of sixteen or so, and behind *them* the little chits of ten and twelve—and they're all pushing along—and in time each lot gets in front, out under the limelight, and has its little year on the

throne—and then gets shoved off to make room for the next. You might have seen two-thirds of these men here ten years ago. But not the women. Oh, no! Only here and there one—an old stager like Polly Wiltshire—or a middle-aged stager like myself. But we're merely salt to the porridge."

"But do you not wish to dance?" he asked her. The orchestra had begun a waltz, and the young ladies from the front stalls, each now attached to a stiffly gyrating male figure, were circling about on the stage, with a floating, wave-like swing of their full skirts which revealed to those below in the stalls rhythmic glimpses of whisking feet and trim black ankles.

"I will dance with you with pleasure," she replied, promptly.

"Unfortunately"—he began with confusion—"it is ridiculous of me, but I never learned."

"Oh, then, we will sit here and talk," she insisted. "I truly don't want to dance. It's ever so much cooler and more comfortable here. One has to come to these things, you know—you have to show yourself or you're like the man who fell out of the balloon—simply not in it. But they're all alike—all deadly stupid unless you're young and want to

kick your legs about—or unless you find some one you're particularly glad to see."

Christian did not seek to evade the implication of the genial glance with which she pointed this last remark. "Yes, it is good of you to stay here with me," he declared. "Except you and my friend who brought me here—I thought I saw him dancing a moment ago—I don't know a soul. I have been saying to-day," he continued, settling down in his seat toward her, "that I make friends badly—I remain here in England almost a stranger."

"Why, I thought you went everywhere. I know I'm forever seeing your name in the 'Morning Post.' You spell it Tower, I notice."

"Oh, yes, I have been going everywhere—but going as one goes alone through a gallery of pictures. I do not bring out any friends with me."

She stole a swift glance at him, as she fanned herself. "You surprise me," she commented. "I should have thought everybody would be running after you."

"Do they? I am not conscious of it." He spoke wearily. "If they do, it does not interest me. They are not my kind of people. They take no hold whatever upon my sympathy. They make no appeal to the imagination."

"You could hardly say that about those ladies' skirts up there," she jocosely remarked. "I had no idea silk petticoats flapped so."

He was not to be diverted from his theme. "It is very funny about me," he went on. "I seem to make no friends among men, of my own age or any other. Of course there are two or three exceptions—but no more. And as for the majority of women, they attract me still less. Yet when, once in a great while, I do meet some one who really interests me, it is always a woman. These few women whom I have in mind—oh, I could count them on the fingers of one hand—they make a much deeper and more lasting impression on me than any man can make."

"I believe that frequently happens," she put in lightly. She did not seem to him to be following his thread of reasoning with conspicuous closeness, but her pleasant smile reassured him.

"I think I am most readily moved on the side of my compassion," he continued, intent upon the development of his self-analysis. "If I am sorry for the people, it is easier for me to like them—that is, if they are young and pretty women."

Cora laughed aloud at this, then lapsed

abruptly into thoughtfulness. "How do you mean?" she asked.

"To-night I went to the place of the—the promenade—the Empire, is it not? And the sight of the young women there—it terribly affected me. I wanted to shout out that they were all my sisters—that I would protect them all—that they should never be forced by poverty and want to face that miserable humiliation again." She looked at him, her lips parted over the beautiful teeth, a certain blankness of non-comprehension in the beautiful eyes. As she slowly grasped the drift of his words, the eyes and lips joined in a reserved and baffling smile. "You're a nice boy," she decided, "but you're tremendously young. Those girls are lazy, greedy, good-for-nothing hussies. They wouldn't do honest work for a living if it was brought to them on a silver salver. They haven't an idea in their empty painted heads except to wheedle or steal money from drunken fools. They're nothing but—what d'ye call 'em?—parasites. I'd put 'em all on the treadmill, if I had my way."

Christian sat up a little, and she was alert in noting the signs of disaffection on his mobile face. "Nevertheless, there is a great sorrow and a great shame in it all," he said, gravely.

"Oh, that I admit," she declared, making busy work with her fan. "Of course! Perhaps I spoke more sharply than I meant. Every one is sorry for the poor creatures—but—but I confess I'm sorrier still for the girls who have to work like slaves for the barest necessities of life. Why, my dressmaker's girls, two of 'em—poor little half-starved sisters who may come at nine or ten o'clock at night to deliver things, or try something on—they get twenty-five shillings a week between them. That's what gets on *my* nerve."

He preserved silence for a time, then suddenly sat upright and faced her. A new light shone in his eyes. "I am the dullest person on earth," he protested. "All this time I have not thought of it. I want to ask you a thousand things about your sister. Did you not know?—She is my oldest friend in England."

Cora drew a long breath, and held up her fan for a protracted and attentive inspection. "Oh, yes—you mean Frank," she said, tentatively.

"Frank? Is that her name? She works. She has a machine à écrire—a typewriter it is called. You must tell me about her! Is she very well? And where is she to be found? How shall I go about it to recall

myself to her?" As there came no immediate response, he put his further meditations into dreamy words: "She spoke the first kind words to me, here in England. I bade farewell to France and the old hard life, in her company. It was she who pointed with her finger for me to have my first look at England—the little, rose-colored island in the green water, with the purple clouds above it. It seemed that we were very close together—on that one day. And I was so full of the thought of seeing her very soon again! And that was September—and now it is very nearly May! . . . But you have not told me! Where is it that she is to be found? Where does she live?"

"She lives at home with my people," Cora replied, still with reflective deliberation. It was with a visible effort that she shook off the preoccupied air into which she had lapsed. "But you don't want to go there—it's out of the world—red-busses and green-busses and a tram and that sort of thing. But she has an office now of her own; that's where you'd find her most easily. Bless me if I know where it is—it's between the Strand and the Embankment, but I never can remember which is Norfolk Street and which Arundel Street—and really I'm not sure she's on either. But my brother is

here. I'll ask him, presently. And so you know Frank?"

"Ah, yes, but you know her better still," said Christian, softly, nestling again into the corner of his chair nearest her. "I wanted you to tell me about her."

"Oh, well—but what is there to tell?" she made answer, vaguely. "She is a good girl; she's frightfully clever; she works very hard, and gives most of her money to her mamma; she's successful, too, because she's got a shop of her own, at last—and—and—that's about all, isn't it? You know, we're not by way of seeing much of each other. There's no quarrel, of course—not the least in the world—but I'm too frivolous to be in her class at all. I dare say it's my fault—I ought to go and look her up. That's what I will do, too, one of these days. But—you mustn't misunderstand me—she's an awfully good girl, that is, of course, if you like that sort of girl. And she's pretty, too, don't you think?"

"Yes, I think so," affirmed Christian, almost with solemnity. "What time would she come to her office—in the morning, I mean?"

"Oh, don't ask me!" laughed Cora. "At some ghastly hour, when they have breakfast, I believe, in cabmen's shelters, and the

streets haven't been swept. I know it only by hearsay. I've never stopped up quite as late as that, you know. But you see something like it, driving round by Covent Garden on your way home from a late dance, to see the flowers. Have you ever done that?"

Christian shook his head. The idea attracted him, apparently. "At what hour is it?" he asked, with interest.

"Oh, four or five or something like that. It's really the prettiest sight you ever saw. I used to go often, at this time of year, and take home a cabload of flowers. But I am getting too old now—and too serious-minded. The mother of a family—you know."

Christian looked at his watch. "It has occurred to me"—he suggested, hesitatingly —"it is now after two—perhaps we could make a party to go this morning. The dancing will not stop earlier, will it?"

On the stage nothing seemed further from any mind than stopping. There was some complicated kind of set dance in progress, which at the moment involved the spectacle of some score of couples, hands all joined, romping madly around in a gigantic ring. The dresses whirled more wildly than ever; the men crooked their legs and hung outward from the circle as they went, stamping

their feet and laughing boisterously. Christian's eyes singled out one young man who seemed to be making most noise of all—and then he perceived that it was Dicky Westland.

"Perhaps it might be arranged," Cora replied, after consideration, and with a sidelong eye upon her companion. "I will go behind for a moment, and find my brother, and see what he says. No, you stop here. I will come back again."

So many people were moving about with entire individual freedom, that he offered no objection to her departure. She pushed her way confidently yet affably past the others in the row, and disappeared at the stage door. He had no clues by which to follow her in fancy after that. Once he thought he distinguished her at the back of the stage —but for the rest it was her sister rather than the friendly Cora who engaged his thoughts. The idea that he was to see her again, quite without delay, seemed to illuminate his whole mind.

In the labyrinth of shunted scenery behind the back-curtain, and along the narrow corridors of dressing-rooms, now devoted to varying hospitable uses, Cora prosecuted what was for a time a fruitless search.

"Where are the gentlemen getting their

drinks?" she asked at last of a cloak-room attendant, and the answer simplified her task. Downstairs, at the door of the manager's room, she was lucky enough to hit upon Major Pirie. "Tell Eddy that I want him, will you, old man," she said, nodding with assurance toward the crowded, smoky little interior, "and if that brother of mine is in there, I want to see him for a minute, too."

The brother came out first—a slender, overdressed youth, with a face which suggested a cheap and inferior copy of Cora's. It had the self-complacency without the high spirits—the comeliness of line without the delicacy of texture and charm of color. He was obviously young in years, but he regarded her through the eyes of an elderly and wearied person.

"Hello," he said, amiably enough. "Goin' to take Eddy home? He won't be the worse for a friendly lead. Oh, he's all right, though, up to now. He's got rippin' odds against Perambulator from Hoskins, seventy to three, you know, in fivers. Try and get him to let me in on the bet, will you? I offered to take half of it, the minute the bet was made—but he didn't answer me. You can work it, if you try, old girl."

"What's Frank's address—her office, I

mean?" she put in abruptly. "Got a pencil? Go and get one from somebody. Thirty-two A, you say? Thanks! Now tell Eddy to come out."

"But what's up? What do you want with Frank? Anything I can tell her?"

"Never you mind! And don't lisp a word to her, or to Eddy or to any one else. If it comes off, it'll be a beano for the lot of us."

"Right you are," he assented, with a glimmer of animation. "But say, you won't forget about the Hoskins bet, will you? If I could even have a third of it! I could do with some odd sovereigns just now, and no mistake."

"Sh-h! Here he comes. You run away now, d'ye see; I want to talk with Eddy."

Captain Edward emerged from the haze of cigarette smoke which veiled the throng within the manager's room. "Well?" he demanded, with a kind of sulky eagerness.

"I haven't told him you were here," Cora began, under her breath, drawing her husband aside down the passage. "It didn't seem to come into the talk. He thinks I'm here with Tom."

Edward looked down upon his wife, with a slow, ponderous glance of mingled hope and uneasiness. He pulled at his small

yellow mustache, and aimlessly jingled some keys in his pocket.

"You've had nearly two hours with him, you know," he protested, doubtfully.

"*Don't* I know it!" she ejaculated, holding up her hands in mock pain at the retrospect. "Good God! If I had a thousand pounds to show for it, I'd say it was the hardest earned money *I* ever handled."

"Yes, but you haven't got anything to show—so far's I can make out," he commented with gloom. "You didn't mention my name at all, eh? But that was what you particularly set out to do, I thought."

"Well, you thought wrong," she responded briskly. "I set out to do what was wisest under the circumstances, and I've done it. I've got an inkling of a game to be played"—she let her eyes twinkle at him as she made this tantalizing little pause—"a game, you old goose, worth seven hundred thousand times anything you ever thought of."

The ex-hussar regarded her fixedly, the while he pondered her words. "I don't think I'm very keen about games," he remarked at last, with obvious suspicion in his tone. "A married woman always gets the worst of games, in the long run."

She grinned affectionate contempt up at

him. "Don't be such a duffer, Eddy!" she remonstrated with him. "If I had a notion of that sort—do you suppose I'd come and give it away to you? What rot you talk!"

"Yes—but what *is* your game?" he demanded, doggedly.

"I won't tell you!" She spoke with great apparent decision. "You'd blab it all over the place. You can no more keep a secret than you can keep a ten-pound note."

"Oh, I say, Cora," he urged, in grieved protestation. "You know I'm a regular balley oyster, where a thing has to be kept dark. You'd better tell me, you know. It'll keep me from—imaginin' things."

The wife smiled. "It's only a plant I've got in my mind," she explained, after consideration. "What's the matter with my naming a wife for him, eh?"

Edward, upon reflection, pouted his lips. "Probably you'd come a cropper over it, in the first place," he objected, slowly, "and then even if you did name the winner, she'd probably welsh us out of our winnings—and besides, what do we want of his marrying at all. The longer he puts off getting married, the less the odds against us gets. I should think even a woman could see that."

Cora permitted herself a frank yawn. "I'll explain it to you to-morrow," she said.

"And now I must go back to my Juggins for a few minutes. I'll come and fetch you when I'm ready to go."

"I don't fancy it much, you know," he urged upon her as she turned. He took a step toward her, and put his hand on her arm. "If your brother Tom was any good" —he began, with a hard growl in his voice— "by God, I'd have half a mind to talk with him about *my* plan. Old Pirie'd be no use— but if Tom had the sense and the nerve— why, we'd—"

She had held his eye with a steady, comprehending glance, under the embarrassment of which his speech faltered and then lapsed altogether. "No, the less either you or Tom have to do with your plan the better. Go in now, and take a plain soda, and wait for me! You've got no plan, mind you. You've simply been dreaming about it. Do you hear? You never had a plan! You can't have one!'

She spoke with significant authority, and he deferred to it with a sullen upward wag of the head. "All right," he muttered curtly, and turned on his heel.

"Plain soda, mind!" she called after him, and without waiting for an answer, ran briskly up the steps toward the stage.

Captain Edward's plain soda had become a

remote and almost wholly effaced memory by the time his wife again summoned him from the manager's room.

"We'll cut this now, if you don't mind," she remarked, in her most casual tone. "I'm as tired as if I'd danced every minute." She had put on her wraps, and her small, pretty face, framed by the white down of her hood, seemed to his scrutiny to wear an expression of increased contentment.

"Anything fresh?" he asked, as they went in search of his coat and hat.

"Yes—fresh is the word," she replied, with simulated nonchalance. "Fresh, fresher, freshest—as we used to say at school."

"Wha' is it?" he inquired, when they were within touch of the open air. The music was still audible behind them, broken by faint, intermittent echoes of stamping feet and laughing voices.

"I'll tell you about it in the morning," she answered listlessly. "I hope to heaven you've got a cab-fare."

"Yes, tha's all right," said Edward, waving his stick toward the rank in the dark middle distance of the street. "Whyn't you tell me all about it?"

"Oh, you wouldn't get onto it now," she replied. But later, in the hansom, the desire

to unburden her mind achieved the mastery.

"Are you awake?" she demanded, and went on: "He's not a bad sort, that boy, you know."

"Damn him!" said Edward, breathing heavily.

"I rather like him myself," she continued. "He's a bit slow to talk to, and he's fresher than Devonshire cream, but there isn't a drop of the Johnnie in him. He's as clean as my little girl."

"Damn him," repeated her husband, but in a milder and even argumentative tone.

"He's a proper bundle of nerves, that youngster," she mused, as if talking to herself. "And whatever those nerves of his tell him to do, he'll do it. And I'd lay odds he's goin' to surprise us all. He's got something boilin' in his mind—something that's just struck him to-night—I could see that. Oh, if I was a man!—I'd get out of this hansom now, and I'd follow that lad, and I'd get hold of him somehow, and I'd bend him any way I chose—*that* would be something like!—but then again, you take him some other way, and he's as stubborn as a moke. But I like him, all the same." She turned toward her husband, and lifted her voice a little. "I like him so much, I'm thinkin' of havin' him for a brother-in-law."

"Strornary thing," commented Edward, earnestly, "no mar'er where I start from, whenever I get t' the Circus, I get the hiccups."

Cora put her head back against the cushions, and closed her eyes.

CHAPTER XVI

Christian discovered that he was not sorry to be alone. Cora's company had been amusing and vivifying, no doubt, but it was even better now to have his own thoughts. He observed with relief that others in the stalls were smoking; tobacco as a rule had not very much meaning for him, but now he lit a large cigar from the dinner-case in his pocket, and stretching himself in his chair, proceeded to enjoy it. He kept his glance, in an indolent fashion, upon the stage, but his mind roamed far and wide.

Cora, in returning to explain that it would not be possible for her to stay till the time for Covent Garden, had ingenuously sat on for nearly another hour, cheering him with her lively prattle. She asked him many questions about himself, his diversions, his tastes, his relations with Lord Julius and Emanuel. He wondered now if these queries had been quite as artless as they seemed at the time. There rose up before him, in retrospect, certain occasional phases of her manner which suggested something

furtive. She had watched the stage, and the doorway leading from it, with a kind of detached uneasiness on which he now languidly speculated. It occurred to him again to wonder if her husband was really in the building. Christian found himself thinking of this cousin of his almost with compassion. Poor devil! Was his fate not even more tragic than that of the others who were merely dead? He regretted now that he had not asked Cora point-blank as to his presence. His mood was so tolerant to-night that even the unforgivable insult to his father lost its sharp outlines, and became only a hasty phrase, the creature of imperative provocation.

In her final leave-taking, Cora had genially proffered her services if he desired to know any or all of the young ladies—and he had begged to be excused. Dicky Westland came down to the stalls later on, and shamefacedly linked a similar offer to his apologies for his prolonged neglect of his guest. But Christian protested that he was enjoying himself thoroughly. He was never less sleepy in his life; he did not want a drink; he would not dream of wishing to go until his friend was entirely ready. "You cannot realize," he concluded, with his persuasive smile, "how strange and interesting this all is to me."

But when Dicky had returned again to the stage, Christian paid less attention than ever to the diverting spectacle. His thoughts reverted obstinately to Captain Edward—and to that portion of the family of which he was the congenital type. Was not that really the sort of man who should have the title? There seemed a cloud of negative reasons, but were these not sentimental abstractions? Should the duke not be a rough, hard sportsman, a man with a passion for horses and dogs and gunpowder saturating his veins? One who loved the country for its rude, toilsome out-of-door sports, and who liked best in town the primitive amusements of the natural man? He figured Edward in his mind's eye most readily as puffing and cursing over a rat-hole with his terriers—or as watching with a shine of steel in his blue eyes the blood-stained progress of a prize-fight. And truly, were these not the things that a duke of Glastonbury of right belonged to?

He could not think of Lord Julius and of Emanuel as being Torrs at all. The older man had the physical inheritance of the family, it was true, but he was almost as much estranged from its ideals as that extraordinary son of his. They both were grotesquely out of the picture of English

aristocratic life, whether in country or town. And he himself—how absolutely he also was out of the picture!

The immensity of the position which his grandfather's death would devolve upon him had been present in his mind, it seemed sleeping as well as waking, for half a year. At the outset he had thrilled at the prospect; sometimes still he was able to reassure himself about it, and to profess to himself confidence that when the emergency came, he would be equal to it. But more often, in these latter days, the outlook depressed him. Of course nothing grievous would happen to him, in any event. He would be assured of an excellent living to the end of his days, with an exceptional amount of social deference from those about him, and relative freedom to do what he liked. He could marry and rear a family of lords and ladies; he could have his speeches in the House of Lords or elsewhere printed in the "Times"; if he looked about in America, he could secure a bride with perhaps millions to her dower. There was, in any case, the reasonable likelihood that he would be, to some extent, the heir of Lord Julius and Emanuel, in the latter part of his life. Thus he could go on, when he set himself to the task, piling up reasons why he ought to view the future

with buoyant serenity—to count himself among the happiest of men.

But then—was this not all self-deception? Did he not know in his heart that he was not happy?—that this gilded and ornate career awaiting him really repelled all his finer senses? To-night as he followed his thoughts behind the transparent screen of whisking dresses and jolting figures upon which his outer vision rested, the impulse to escape the whole thing rose strong within him. Already he had sworn that he would no longer weary himself with the meaningless and distasteful routine of social obligations in London. Why should he not plunge boldly forward beyond that, and say that he would make no further sacrifices of any sort to the conventions of mediocrity?

He lit another cigar and, rising, walked about a little by himself at the side of the stalls, his hands deep in his pockets, his brows knitted in formative introspection.

First of all, it was clear that Emanuel's hopes about his taking up the System were doomed. It was not in him to assume such a part. He had not the capacity for such work; even if he had, he lacked both the tremendous driving energy and the enthusiasm.

But when Emanuel learned this, then he

would be angry, and he would cover over no more money to that account at the bank. Eh bien! It couldn't be helped. Christian recalled that he had still at that blessed bank more than sixty thousand francs!—truly a prodigious sum, when one thought of it soberly. The question whether this sum ought not to be given back to Emanuel, under certain circumstances, seemed to have settled itself. When it had first occurred to him that afternoon, it had suggested a good many moral difficulties. But it was really simplicity itself, as he considered it now. There were all those lean and poverty-stricken years of his youth and childhood to be remembered—and, stretching back beyond that, those other years of his father's exile before he was born—nearly forty in all. The intelligent thing was to regard the three thousand pounds as a sort of restitution fund, to be spread out over the whole of that long period. Viewed in this light, the annual fraction of it was a paltry matter. Besides, Emanuel had expressly declared that no conditions whatever were attached to the money. Christian saw that he could make his mind quite easy on that score.

So then, there were sixty thousand francs! With that he might live admirably, even luxuriously, on the Continent, until his

grandfather's death. That event would of course alter everything. There would then come automatically to him—no matter where he was or what he did—a certain fixed income, which he understood to be probably over rather than under seventy-five thousand francs a year. This—still on the Continent—would be almost incredible wealth! There was really no limit to the soul-satisfying possibilities it opened before him. He would have a yacht on the Mediterranean; he would have a little chateau in the marvelous green depths of the Styrian Mountains—of which a boyhood friend had told him with such tender reverence of memory. He would see Innsbruck and Moscow, and, if he liked, even Samarkand and China. Why, he could go round the world in his yacht, if he chose—to remote spice islands and tropical seas! He could be a duke when, and as much, as it pleased him to be one. Instead of being the slave to his position and title, he would make them minister to him. He would do original things—realize his own inner fancies and predilections. If the whim seized him to climb Mount Ararat, or to cross the Sahara with a caravan of his own servants—that he would do. But above all things—now and henceforth forever, he would be a free man! He

laughed grimly as he thought how slight was the actual difference between the life of pauper bondage he had led up to last October, and the existence which polite England and London had imposed upon him ever since. The second set of chains were of precious metal—that was all. Well, hereafter there would be no fetters of any description!

"I'm quite ready to go now, old man, if you are," Dicky Westland said at some belated stage of this reverie. He had approached without being seen by his friend, and he had to pull at Christian's sleeve to attract his attention. "I fancy you've been walking in your sleep," he laughed, in comment upon this.

Christian shook himself, and, blinking at Dicky, protested that he had never been more wide awake in his life. "I go only if you're entirely ready," he said. "Don't dream of leaving on my account. I have been extremely interested, I assure you."

"Every fellow has his own notions of enjoyment," reflected Westland, with drowsy philosophy, as they went up the stairs toward the stage. "I tried to explain your point of view to some of the girls up here, but I'm not sure they quite grasped it. They were dying to have me bring you up

and make you dance, you know. By George, I had a job to keep Dolly Montressor from coming down and fetching you, off her own bat."

"How should they know or care about me?" asked Christian. "I didn't expect to be pointed out."

"My dear man," retorted Dicky, sleepily, "no one pointed you out. They all know you by sight as well as they do George Edwardes. It isn't too late, still, you know —if you really would like to be introduced."

Christian shook his head with resolution, as they halted at the wings. "Truly, no!" he repeated. "But I should like a glass of wine and a sandwich, if we can get past the stage. I'm not an atom sleepy, but I'm hungry and thirsty."

On their way through a narrow, shadowed defile of huge canvas-stretched frames of deal, they passed two young men, one much taller than the other, who had their heads bent together in some low-voiced, private conversation. Christian glanced at them casually, and was struck with the notion that they observed him in turn, and exchanged comment upon his approach. He looked at them with a keener scrutiny as he went by— and it seemed to him that there was something familiar in the face of the larger man

—who indeed looked away upon the instant their eyes met.

"Did you see those men?" he asked Westland, in an undertone, a moment later. "Do you know them?"

"Those we just passed?" Dicky looked over his shoulder. "I don't know the thin chap, but the other fellow is Gus Torr—why, of course—your cousin. Somehow, I never think of you as belonging to that lot—I mean, being related to them. Of course—that was his sister-in-law you were sitting with. Why did you ask if I knew him?"

"Nothing—I was not sure if it was he—I've seen him only once," Christian replied, with an assumption of indifference. "I remember having noticed then how much he looked like his brother."

"Yes—poor devils!" commented Dicky, as they entered the manager's room. Apparently it was in his mind to say more, but the place was crowded, and the problem of getting through the throng to the food and drink monopolized his attention.

Some minutes later, while Christian stood in another corridor, waiting for his friend to bring their hats and coats from the mysteriously elusive spot where he had left them, he overheard the mention of his name. Two women's voices, wholly unknown to him,

came from behind an improvised partition of screens near at hand, with great distinctness.

One of them said: "He spells his name 'Tower,' you know. I understand the idea is to make people forget who his father was."

"Good job, too!" replied the other voice.

Christian turned abruptly, and strode off in the direction whither Dicky had disappeared. "After forty years!" he murmured hotly to himself. "After forty years!" and clenched his fists till the nails hurt his palms.

The two young men walked homeward, arm in arm, through silent streets over which the dawn was spreading its tentative first lights. It was colder than they had thought, and the morning air was at once misty and fresh. In Leicester Square the scent of lilacs came to them; beside the pale, undefined bulk of the squat statue they caught the lavender splash of color which was sister to the perfume.

"By Jove, it's spring!" said Dicky. He pointed out the flowers, and then, still drawing Christian's arm to turn his attention to the square, recalled to him as they moved that this was the oldtime haunt of foreigners in London. "Dickens's villain in 'Little

Dorrit,' you know—the fellow whose mustache went up and his nose went down—I never can remember his name—he lived here. In those days, all that sort of chappies lived here—the adventurers and jailbirds who had made their own countries too hot to hold them."

Westland's insistence upon this theme had no purpose other than to divert Christian's attention while they passed the Empire. He was tired, and profoundly disinclined to any renewal of the discussion about the promenade. He encountered with vague surprise, therefore, the frowning glance which Christian, half halting, bent upon him. The young man's displeasure was marked, but Dicky for the life of him could not imagine why. He tightened his hold on the other's arm and quickened their pace.

But Christian, after a few yards, suddenly withdrew his arm altogether. "I do not like to walk so fast," he said, with a sharp note in his voice.

Dicky regarded him with puzzled apprehension. "What's up, old man?" he asked, almost pleadingly. "Has anything gone wrong?"

Christian, still with knitted brows, parted his lips to speak. Then he seemed to reconsider his intention, and let his face soften as

he paused. "No—nothing at all," he replied, after a moment. He smiled a little to reassure the other. "It was nothing at all," he repeated. "Only I am nervous and excited to-night—this morning, I should say—and my head is full of projects. It is twelve hours since you came to me—and the whole world has changed meanwhile. I see everything different. I am not altered to your eyes—but none the less, I am not at all, in any respect, the man you took to dine with you. You have not observed anything—but it is a revolution that has occurred under your very nose, Mr. Dicky Westland."

"I'm too sleepy to observe anything," the other declared. "I couldn't tell a revolution from a—from a hot-potato can."

The comparison had forced itself upon Westland's jaded mind through the medium of his weary eyes. There before them, by the curb at the corner, stood the dingy wheeled-oven of the streets, the sullen red glow of its lower door making a strange patch of fiery light upon the ragged trousers of the man in charge. He was a dirty and undersized creature, and he looked up at the two young gentlemen in evening dress with a speculative, yet hardly hopeful, eye.

Christian stopped short. "Ah, this is

very good," he said, with a brightening face. "I have never eaten a potato from a can."

Dicky sighed, but resigned himself with only a languid protest: "You have to eat so much else besides the potato," he commented dolefully.

The man opened an upper door, and then drew from under the machine a twisted wad of old newspaper, which, being unwound, revealed a gray heap of salt. "How many, cap'n?" he demanded, briefly.

Christian had been glancing across the Circus meanwhile—to where, in the misty vagueness of dawn, Piccadilly opened between its tall, shapely corners, and beyond, the curved yellowish sweep of Regent Street began. The dim light revealed some lurking figures to his eyes.

"Can you call over those women?" he asked the potato-man.

A tall, fresh-faced young policeman came upon the group round the Criterion corner. Although the pounding of his thick boots on the pavement had been audible long before his appearance, he regarded them with the slightly dramatic air of one who has deftly surprised a group of conspirators. The potato-man looked from Christian to the officer and made no reply.

Christian drew some silver from his

pocket, shaking off the restraining hand Westland tried to lay on his arm. "Is there any objection, constable," he inquired, "to my buying potatoes for those friends of ours over there? It is a cold morning."

The policeman's glance ranged from the white ties of the young gentlemen to the coins in Christian's palm. His official expression relaxed. "I dare say it'll do no 'arm, sir," he replied with courtesy. He even lent himself to the enterprise by stooping down and beating a certain number of strokes with his baton on the pavement."

"How many times did he strike?" Dicky made whispered inquiry. "That's a new dodge to me."

New or old, it was efficient. Forlorn shapes began to emerge from the shadows of the big streets opposite, and move forward across the empty open space. Others stole noiselessly in from the byways of Leicester Square. There were perhaps a dozen in all when the potato-man made his census—poorly dressed, fagged, bold-faced, furtive-eyed women. They spoke in monotonous, subdued tones among themselves. There were to be heard German, French, Belgian French, cockney English, and Lancashire English. Two of them pulled at the sleeve of the potato-man to make him hurry.

Christian, regarding his motley guests, found himself neither touched nor entertained. They seemed as stupid as they were squalid. With a gesture of decision he gave the money to the policeman.

"Pay for it all," he directed, "and if more come, give them a look-in, too—and keep what is left for yourself."

"Now then, Frenchy!" broke in the constable, sharply. "Mind what you're at! Pass Germany the salt!" With an abrupt change to civility, he turned to Christian. "Right you are, sir!" he said.

Dicky laughed drowsily. "It's like the Concert of Europe," he declared. "Shall we go on?"

They moved down the broad pavement, again arm in arm, breathing in slowly the new, keen air, and observing in a silence which was full of tacit comment the beautiful termination of the street before them: the dark figures of the Crimean monument standing in grim relief against the morning light, the stately palace beyond, with its formal portals of club buildings, its embowered statues, its huge column towering ponderously above the pale green of spring in the park—all gray and cool and, as it were, thoughtfully solemn in the hush of daybreak.

"Ah, yes—this wonderful London!" sighed Christian, as they halted at the Continental corner. He spread his hand to embrace the prospect before them. "How right you were! I have not learned to know it at all. But I begin now! If you will walk through the square with me—there is something I wish to say."

This something did not get itself said till they halted within this somber, slate-colored square. Christian paused before a big, pretentious house of gloomy, and even forbidding aspect—a front of sooty stucco, with cornices of ashen-hued stone, and many windows masked with sullen brown shades.

"This was our town house a hundred years ago," he said meditatively. "My father was born here. My grandfather sold it when the entail was broken. Until this afternoon, it was my fixed resolve to buy it back again. I said always to myself: 'If I am to have a house in London, it must be this old one of ours in St. James's.' But that is all changed now. At least, it is no longer a resolve."

Dicky gazed at him with sleepy eyes. "How do you mean?" he asked, perfunctorily.

"Wake up now, and I will tell you!" Christian, with a lingering glance, as of renuncia-

tion, at the mansion, began to walk again. "This is it. You said you were eager to be some colonial official's secretary—to have three hundred pounds—and the yellow fever. To obtain this, you expend all your energies, you and your relations. Well, then—why will you not be my secretary instead? You shall have more than three hundred pounds—and no yellow fever."

Westland had roused himself, and looked inquiringly now into the other's face. "What do you need of a secretary?" he objected, half jestingly. "If you want to talk about it after you've come into the thing—I don't say that I shouldn't be glad to consider it. But the deuce of it is——"

"No—I wish it to begin now, this morning, this hour—this minute!" Christian spoke peremptorily.

Dicky, pondering, shook his head. "No, you mustn't insist on settling anything now," he decided. "It isn't regular, you know. If you—really—want to propose something immediate—why, I'll call and talk with you to-morrow—or, that is to say, this afternoon. But I couldn't possibly let you commit yourself to anything of that sort now."

Christian frowned at his friend. "You speak of what you will let me do!" he said.

"In your opinion—I see it!—you think I have not sober command of myself, am not responsible—is that it?"

"Nonsense! I've said nothing of the sort," protested the other. "Of course, you're perfectly all right—but we're both tired and sleepy, and you're not so accustomed to go home by daylight as I am—and it wouldn't be at all the thing for me to close a bargain with you now. Can't you see what I mean? I wouldn't play three-penny ecarté with you at this hour in the morning—and I'm damned if I'm going to let you in for three hundred a year for the rest of my life. Shall I come round, say, at luncheon time?"

"I shall not be in," said Christian, curtly. He looked at his companion, and then past him at the trees in the square, in vexed rumination. "What I have it in my mind to do"—he continued, vaguely, after a pause —"it is not a thing for delay. It is in my blood to do it at once. It was my impulse to make you my comrade in it—but of course, since you have your reservations and doubts, there need be nothing more said about it."

The shrug of the shoulders which emphasized these last words nettled Westland, and at the same time helped him to repress his annoyance. It lent to the whole episode just

that savor of foreign eccentricity which appealed to the amiable tolerance of the islander.

"My dear man," he urged, gently, "I haven't the slightest notion what it is that you're so keen about—but whatever it is, do go home and sleep on it, and make up your mind calmly after breakfast. It's no good deciding important questions, and striking out new lines, and all that sort of thing, at this hour in the morning. Nobody ever does it, you know. It simply can't be done."

"Good-night!" said Christian, proffering his hand. "You are right; it is high time for those who are sleepy to go to bed I won't drag you round to Duke Street."

Dicky looked at him doubtfully. "You do wrong to be angry, you know," he said.

"But that is your error—I am not in the least angry—I beg you to believe it," cried Christian. His eyes beamed genially in proof of his assertion, and he put heartiness into his voice. "For a minute I was disappointed—shall I say vexed?—but not any more. How should I quarrel with you for not beholding things through my eyes? To me, something is a giant; you perceive that it is a windmill. Eh bien! We do not convince each other—but surely we do not quarrel."

"Oh, I am game enough to play Sancho to your Don," expostulated Dicky, with a readiness which Christian had not looked for, "but I draw the line at starting out on an empty stomach, and when we're too sleepy to stand. Well, what shall it be?" He took the hand offered him, and strove to signify by his cordial grasp that no trace of a misunderstanding remained. "Shall I look you up, say, at two o'clock?"

"I do not think I shall be there. Good-night!" responded Christian, and the two parted.

CHAPTER XVII

Christian climbed the stairs at Duke Street, and let himself into his apartments, with painstaking precautions against being overheard. There was an excess of zeal about Falkner which might easily impel him to present himself for service at even this most unseasonable hour.

The young man had still only formless notions of what he was going to do, but it was at least plain to him that Falkner was to have no part in the proceedings. He drew off his varnished boots as a further measure of security, and then, with more hesitation, removed his cloak and coat, and raised the inside blinds at the two windows. This sitting-room of his had rather pleased him formerly. He could recall having taken quite an affectionate interest in buying and arranging the rugs and pictures and book-cases with which he had supplemented the somewhat gaunt furnishing of his predecessor. But now, in this misty and reluctant light of the London morning, nothing seemed good to him as he looked about.

The pretty things of his own selection said no more to him than did the chattels he had taken over from a stranger. There was no spirit of home in them.

He moved noiselessly to the adjoining bedroom, and drew the curtains there as well, and glanced round. Here, too, he had the sense of beholding the casual appointments of a hotel chamber. Nothing made an appeal of intimacy to him. He reflected that in a day or two he should not be able to remember how his room looked—even if his memory attempted the fatuous task. Duke Street had been engraved on his cards for six months, but it had not made the faintest mark on his heart.

With an air of decision, he suddenly began to drag forth his clothes from the wardrobe and drawers, and spread them on the bed. In the tiny dressing-room beyond were piled his traveling bags, and these he brought out into the light. Upon consideration, however, the original impulse to take a good many things weakened and dwindled. To begin with, their secret removal was in no way practicable. Moreover, now that he thought of it, he did not want them. They would be simply encumbrances. He would take with him only the smallest handbag, with a change of linen and a few brushes.

Finally, the conviction that even this must be a nuisance became clear to him, and he desisted from the random packing he had begun. Still moving about as silently as possible, he changed his ceremonial tie for one of every-day wear, and put on a suit of sober-colored tweeds, and his easiest brown boots. The transfer of his watch, some loose gold and the roll of notes from one set of pockets to another, completed his preparations in the bedchamber. He tiptoed out to the larger room, and there, upon reflection, wrote a few lines for Falkner's direction, saying merely that he was called away, and that matters were to go on as usual until he returned or sent further orders. He separated a banknote from the roll to place inside this note, but on second thoughts wrote a check instead, and sealing and directing the envelope, laid it in a conspicuous place on the table.

He noticed then, for the first time, that there were some letters from the evening post for him, neatly arranged on this table. He opened the nearest, and glanced at its contents: it was a note from his second cousin, Lady Milly Poynes, the fair-haired, fair-faced, fair-brained, fair-everything sister of Lord Lingfield, reminding him that she was depending upon his escort for the Private

View of the Academy, and that the time for getting tickets was running very short. He laughed aloud at the conceit of the Royal Academy rising in his path as an obstacle at such a moment—and without more ado thrust this with the unopened letters into his pocket. Then, when he had made sure once more that he had his check-book, nothing remained to be done. He went softly forth, without so much as a thought of taking a farewell glance behind him, found a soft dark hat in the hallway and then closed the outer door with great care upon the whole Duke Street episode of his life.

"You are not to see me here again in a hurry," he confided aloud to the banisters and steps, when he had descended to the first floor. Then he laughed to himself, and tripped gaily down the remaining flight.

There was no hesitation now in his mood. He walked briskly back through the square, and then down Waterloo Place, till he came to the Guards' Memorial. He moved round this to the front, and looked up at one of the three bronze Guardsmen with the confident air of familiarity. He knew this immutable, somber face under every shifting aspect of light and shadow; he had stared at the mantling greatcoat and the huge bearskin

of this hero of his a hundred times. The very first day of his arrival in London he had made the acquaintance of this statue, and had started, dazed and fascinated, at the strange resemblance it suggested. Thus his boy-father must have looked, with the beard and the heavy dress of the Russian winter. The metal figure came to mean to him more than all London beside. In the sad, strong, silent countenance which gazed down upon him he read forever the tragedy that gripped his heartstrings. Forever Honor, standing aloft, held the laurel wreath poised high above the warrior's head—immovable in the air, never to descend to touch its mark. Christian had seen this wreath always through moist eyes.

This morning, for a wonder, no tearful impulse came to him as he looked upward. The impassive face was as gravely fine as ever, but its customary effect of pathos was lacking. There even seemed in its sightless eyes a latent perception of Christian's altered mood. He lifted his hat soberly and saluted the statue.

Toward the Strand now he made his way, walking blithely, and humming to himself. He could not forbear to smile at a policeman he passed in front of St. Martin's. Two elderly and much bewrapped cabmen stood

stamping their feet beside a shelter, and they pointed toward their ridiculous old horses and battered growlers as he came along, with an air that moved him to glee. He gave them a shilling to divide, and went on, conscious of a novel delight in himself and in the world at large.

The big clock showed it to be half-past five. There was no blue in the sky, but the mist of daybreak was abating, and the air was milder. Not a living creature was visible along the naked length of the Strand. At the end, the beautiful spire of St. Mary's rose from the dim grays about its base, exquisite in tints and contour as an Alpine summit in the moment before sunrise.

A turning to the left opened to Christian, unexpectedly, a scene full of motion and color. He had not thought himself so near Covent Garden, but clearly this must be it. He walked up toward the busy scene of high-laden vans, big cart-horses and swarming porters, wondering why no sign of all this activity was manifest in the sleeping Strand below, barely a stone's throw distant. He saw the glowing banks of flowers within, as he approached, and made toward them, sighing already with pleasure at the promise they held out to him.

He might have read in the papers that it

was a backward and a grudging April, this year, in the matter of flowers. But to Christian, no memory of the exuberant South suggested any rivalry with this wonderful show of northern blossoms. Tulips and daffodils, amaryllis and azaleas, rhododendrons, carnations, roses—he seemed to have imagined to himself nothing like this before. He spent over an hour among them, in the end making numerous purchases. At each stall he gave an address—always the same—and exacted the pledge of delivery at eight o'clock.

At last he could in reason buy nothing more, and he went out to look about him. He found the place where the market-men take drinks at all hours, and food and coffee when nature's sternest demands can be positively no longer disregarded—but it did not invite his appetite. Some further time he spent in gazing wondering at the vast walls of vegetables and fruit being tirelessly built up and pulled down again, pondering meanwhile the question whether he should breakfast before eight o'clock, or at some indefinitely later hour. He partially solved the problem at length by buying a small box of Algerian peaches, and eating them where he stood. Then some exceptionally fine bananas tempted him further, and

he finished with a delicate little melon from Sicily.

How it carried him back to the days of his youth—this early morning fragrance of the fresh fruit! It was as if he were at Cannes again—only buoyant now, and happy, and oh, so free! And in his pocket he could feel whenever he liked the soft, munificent crackle of over four thousand francs! The sapphire Mediterranean had surely never been so lovely to his gaze as was now the dingy Strand below.

The laggard hour came round at last. He descended to Arundel Street, and discovered the house he wanted, and found just within the entrance two or three of the flower-laden porters awaiting his arrival. For the rest, the building seemed profoundly unoccupied. He led the way up to the third floor, and had the plants set down beside the locked door which bore the sign "Miss Bailey." Other similarly burdened porters made their appearance in turn, till the narrow hallway looked like a floral annex to the Garden itself.

He waited alone with his treasures for what seemed to him a very long time, then descended and stood at the street door till he was tired, then climbed the stairs again. The extraordinary quiet of the big building,

filled with business offices as it was, puzzled him. He had no experience of early-morning London to warn him that English habits differed from those of the continent. It occurred to him that perhaps it was a holiday —conceivably one of those extraordinary interludes called Bank Holidays—and he essayed a perplexing computation in the calendar in the effort to settle this point.

Finally there began the sounds of steps, and the opening and closing of doors, below him. A tow-headed boy in buttons came up to his landing, stared in vacuous amazement at him and the flowers and passed on to the next floor. Noises of occupancy rose from the well of the staircase to bear him countenance, and suddenly a lift glided up past him in this well. He had not noticed the ropes or the iron caging before. He heard the slamming of the lift doors above, and the dark carriage followed on its smooth descent. Christian reproached himself for not having rung the bell and questioned the lift-man. He considered the feasibility of doing it now, but was deterred by the fear that the man would resent it. Then the lift came up again—and was stopping at his floor. There was a sharp note of girlish laughter on the instant of the halt, answered by a male guffaw.

A slight, erect, active young woman emerged from the lift, her face alive with mirth of some unknown character. Behind her, in the obscurity, Christian saw for an instant the vanishing countenance of the lift-man, grinning widely. This hilarity, somehow, struck in him an unsympathetic chord.

The young woman, still laughing, spread an uncomprehending glance over Christian and his flowers. She moved past him, key in hand, toward the door which he had been guarding, with a puzzled eye upon him meanwhile. With the key in the lock she turned and decided to speak.

"What might all this be—the Temple Flower Show or the Crystal Palace?" she asked, with banter in her tone.

"These are for Miss Bailey," said Christian, quite humbly.

"Must be some mistake," said the girl decisively. "Did she order them herself? Were you there at the time? Did you see her? Where do they come from?"

Christian advanced a little into the light. "She has not ordered them," he said, in his calmest voice. "I have not seen her for a long time. But I have brought them for her, and I think you may take it from me that they are hers."

"Oh, I beg your pardon," she replied,

lightly but with grace. "I didn't understand. Things are forever being brought here that belong somewhere else. Men are so stupid in finding their way about! Well —I suppose we must get them inside. That is your idea, isn't it?"

She spoke very rapidly, and with a kind of metallic snap in her tones. Christian answered her questions by a suave assenting gesture. "Miss Bailey is not likely to turn up much before half-past nine," she went on, as if he had made the inquiry. "She lives so far out, and just now we're not very busy. There's nothing doing in new plays at this time of the year, and the lady novelists are all getting their own typewriters. If you'll lend a hand, we'll carry the things in."

Between them they bore in the various pots, and the big bouquets loosely wrapped in blue paper. The girl led the way through a large working-room to a smaller apartment, fitted as an office but containing also a sofa and a tall gas cooking-stove—and here on desk and center-table, chairs and window-sill, they placed the flowers. Christian watched her as she deftly removed their paper wrappings. She had a comely, small face of aspect at once alert and masterful. The skin was peculiarly fair, with a tinge of rose in the cheeks so delicately modulated

that he found it in rivalry with the "Mrs. Pauls" she was unpacking. Her light hair was drawn plainly down over the temples in a fashion which he felt was distinguished, but said to himself he did not like. Her shrewd eyes took calm cognizance of him from time to time.

"They are very beautiful indeed," she remarked with judicial approval, upon the completion of her task. Then, as upon an afterthought, she moved rapidly about, peering under the branches of the growing plants, and separating the cut flowers lightly with her hands. "There is no card anywhere, is there? I suppose you will want to leave a message? Here are pen and ink—if you wish to write anything."

"Thank you," Christian began, smilingly but with obvious hesitation. He looked at his watch. "If you don't mind—if you're quite sure I shan't be in the way—I think I should like to wait till Miss Bailey comes."

"Oh, you won't be in the way," the girl replied. She regarded him meditatively, with narrowed eyes. "I shouldn't dust this room in any event—since the flowers are here; but you mustn't come out into the big room—unless you want to get choked with blacks. Would you like a morning paper? I can send a boy out for one."

"Thank you—you are very good—no," Christian answered. "There are some books here—I shall amuse myself."

The girl turned to leave him, and then on second thought moved over to the window and lifted the sash. "There'll be no objection to your smoking if you like," she informed him. Then she went out, closing the door behind her.

Christian walked to the window in turn, and looked down over the flowers to the narrow street below. It was full of young men in silk hats, toiling up the granite ascent like black ants. He reflected that they must be clerks and shopmen, going to their daily work from the Temple station or the Embankment. The suggestion of monotonous bondage which their swarming progress toward the wage-earning center gave forth, interested him. He yawned pleasurably at the thought of his own superb emancipation from duties and tasks of all descriptions.

He strolled over to the bookcase above the desk, and glanced at the volumes revealed through its glass doors. They seemed very serious books, indeed. "Economics of Socialism," "Capitalist Production," "The Ethics of Socialism," "Towards Democracy"—so the titles ran that first met his eye. There

were other groups—mainly of history and the essayists—but everything was substantial. His glance sought in vain any lightsome gleam of poetry or fiction. The legend on a thin red book, "Civilization: Its Cause and Cure," whimsically caught his attention. He put his hand to the key in the bookcase door to get out the volume; then, hesitating, yawned, and looked over the shelves once more. There was nothing else—and really he desired to read nothing.

He would half recline in comfort upon the sofa instead, until his friend came. As a pleasing adjunct to this plan, he drew the table up close, and found room upon it, by crowding them together, for most of the flowers that had been bestowed elsewhere. He seated himself at his ease, with his head resting against the wall, and surveyed the plants and blossoms in affectionate admiration. It was delicious to think how naïve her surprise would be—how great her pleasure! Truly, since his discovery of his birthright, remarkable and varied as had been his experiences, he had done nothing else which afforded him a tithe of the satisfaction he felt now glowing in all his veins. Here, at last, by some curious and devious chance, he had stumbled upon the thing that was genuinely worth doing.

He could hear the cheerful girl in the next room, whistling gently to herself as she moved the furniture about. There came presently the sound of other female voices, and then a sustained, vibrant rattle, quaintly accentuated like the ticking of a telegraph key, which he grew accustomed to, and even found pleasant to the ear.

He put his feet up on the edge of the sofa —and nestled downward till his head was upon it as well. A delicate yet pervasive fragrance from the table close beside him aroused his languid curiosity. Was it the perfume of carnations or of roses?

He closed his eyes the better to decide.

CHAPTER XVIII

In the outer room, Miss Connie Staples permitted herself numerous and varied speculations as to the identity and purposes of the young man with the flowers, the while she dusted the typewriters, distributed the copy for the morning's start and set the place in order. She had her sleeves rolled up, and had wound a big handkerchief about her hair; beneath this turban her forehead scored itself in lines of perplexed wonderment as to this curious early caller—but when two other girls arrived, she suffered them to put aside their things and begin work without so much as hinting at what had happened. A third girl, coming a little later, brought in a stray blossom which she had picked up in the corridor outside. She mentioned the fact, and even laid stress upon it, but got no syllable of explanation.

This was all simple enough, but at half-past nine the arrival of still another of the sex put Miss Connie's resources to an unexpected test.

A handsome, youngish woman, very well dressed indeed, appeared suddenly upon the

threshold of the workroom, knocking upon the door and pushing it wide open at the same instant. She looked curiously about, and then point-blank into the face of the girl who came toward her. It was a glance of independent and impersonal criticism which the two exchanged, covering with instantaneous swiftness an infinitude of details as to dress, coiffure, complexion, figure, temperament and origin. Connie wondered if the new-comer was really quite a lady, long before she formulated an inquiring thought about her errand. Even as she finally looked this question of business, she decided that it was an actress with a play for the provinces, and asked herself if she did not seem to recognize the face. The visitor, for her part, saw that Connie's teeth were too uneven to be false, and that her waist was overlong, and that her hair was not thick enough to be worn flat over the temples, much less to justify so confident a manner. In all, something less than a second of time had elapsed.

"I want to see Miss Bailey—Miss Frank Bailey," explained the stranger, graciously.

Connie conveyed to her, with courteous brevity, the fact that Miss Bailey had not yet arrived. "Is it something that I can do?" she added.

The other shook her head, and showed an affable thread of white between her fresh-hued lips. "No, I will wait for her," she answered, and threw a keen glance about the place. "That's her private room, isn't it?" she asked, nodding at the closed door to the right. "I will wait in there," she decided, in the same breath, and began moving toward it.

Connie alertly headed her off. "If you will kindly take a seat here—" she interposed, standing in front of her visitor.

"It's too noisy out here," remarked the other; "those horrid machines would give me a headache. That *is* her private room, isn't it?"

"Unfortunately," Connie began, lowering her voice, "the room belongs to another office. Or rather, I should say, it is locked. Miss Bailey will be here—with the key—very shortly now."

"Oh, it's all right—I'm her sister," explained the other, in no wise resenting the ineffectual fabrications. She pushed forward past the reluctant girl with a resolute step, and put her hand on the knob of the tabooed door. "Make your mind quite easy, my dear," she remarked over her shoulder, sinking her voice in turn in deference to the situation; "you've done all

that could be expected of you—and I'll tell her so."

Then, with a momentary gleam of good nature on her pretty face, which the short transparent veil she wore to her chin seemed to accentuate rather than mask, she opened the door, threw up her head with a swift, puzzled glance at what she saw, and then tiptoed gracefully into the room, closing the door with painstaking noiselessness behind her.

Miss Frances Bailey entered her office not many minutes later, her cheeks aglow with the morning air as the wheelwoman meets it. She nodded cheerfully to Connie, and beyond her to the girls at the machines, as her hand sought for a hat-pin at the back of her head.

"Any word from the Lyceum?" she asked. "And what does that Zambesi-travel manuscript make?"

Connie ignored industrial topics. "There are people waiting in there to see you," she announced, in low, significant tones.

The mistress was impressed by the suggestion of mystery. "People? What people?" she asked, knitting her brows.

"One of them says she's your sister. And the other is a young gentleman—he came first—and he brought—"

"My sister?" interrupted Miss Bailey. "Cora! Something dreadful must have happened—for she never got out so early as this before in her life. Is she in mourning? Did she seem upset?"

"*Not* a bit of it!" said Connie, reassuringly. She added, following the other toward the private office: "I tried my best to keep her out here."

"Why should you?" asked Frances, with wide-open eyes.

"Oh, well—you'll see," replied the girl, evasively. "I told you there was some one else in there."

Frances opened the door—and Connie noted that she too lifted her head and stared a little, and then cautiously closed the door behind her. She pondered this as she returned to her machine, and she curled her thin lip when she took up the copies of the first act of an amateur's romantic play, to underscore the business directions with red ink, and sew on brown paper covers. Intuition told her that a much better drama was afoot, here under her very nose.

Inside her office, Miss Bailey surrendered herself to frank astonishment at what she beheld.

Bestowed in obvious discomfort upon her sofa, behind an extraordinary bank of potted

plants and bright, costly greenhouse flowers, was a young man fast asleep. Her eye took in as well her sister, who sat near the head of the sofa, but she could wait. The interest centered in this sleeping stranger, who made himself so much at home in the shelter of his remarkable floral barricade. She moved round the better to scrutinize his face, which was tilted up as if proudly held even in slumber. Upon examination she recognized the countenance; and in a swift moment of concentration tried to think what his presence might signify. Then she turned to her sister, and lifted her calm brows in mute inquiry.

"Oh, my dear—what splendid business!" whispered Cora, her glance beaming upward from the sofa to the standing figure. "And mind, Frank, I'm in it! I'm in it up to my neck! I sent him to you, dear."

The girl looked down at them both, and deliberated before she spoke. "If you brought him here," she said, "I think you'd better take him away again. I can let you out by this other door. Let us have no more publicity than necessary."

"But you don't in the least understand!" protested Cora, with her finger raised in an appeal for quiet tones.

"No, I don't understand. I don't want

to understand," replied Frances coldly. "There's one thing *you* don't understand either, Cora: This is my typewriting office; it isn't a greenroom at all."

"Then it well might be," retorted the other, with a latent grin. "Anything greener than its owner I never saw. Now listen—don't be a silly cuckoo! I met the youngster last night—and I worked him up till he was mad to learn where you were to be found. I told him—and then I went home, and I couldn't sleep for thinkin' of you, dear—and so I turned out at some extraordinary hour this mornin'—it is mornin' by this time, isn't it?—and I came here, just to tell you that he was askin' after you—and I come in here—and lo! here's the bird on his little nest!—and see the flowers he's brought from Covent Garden for you!—and so I sit here like Patience on a monument, afraid to wink an eyelash, so's not to wake him till you come. That's what I've done for *you*, dear—and presently, if you don't mind, I'd like to hear what you'll do for me."

Frances put a knee upon the chair before her, and rested with her hands upon its back. She sighed a little, and bit her lips. A troubled look came into her gray eyes.

"You might as well say all you have to

say," she said, slowly. "I don't in the least see what you're up to—but then I never did."

"No, dear, you never did," responded Cora, smiling as if in pleased retrospect. "But that's no reason why I shouldn't be a good sister to you. If it's one's nature to be a good sister, why, then one will be—and there you are, don't you see? I take no credit to myself for it."

"Go on," said the other. The two women spoke in hushed whispers, and with each sentence stole glances of precaution toward the sleeper.

"Well, Frank, I look to you not to forget what I've done. I spent two or three very hard hours last night talkin' him round, and singin' your praises to him—and I put Covent Garden into his head, too—and here he is! And I kept Eddy and Gus off his back, too—they were frightfully keen to get at him—but I said no, and I held 'em to heel. It was all for you, dear. They might have queered the whole pitch, if I'd given 'em their heads. But now about myself. I'm tired, dead tired, of bein' poor. Of course we get a little something from Lord Julius. But Eddy—you know what Eddy is! No sooner does he pick himself up from Epsom than Ascot gives him a fair knock-

out, and if he lives through the Sandown Eclipse there's Goodwood waitin' for him with a facer. I can't understand it; other men seem to win sometimes—you'd think the unluckiest duffer would get a look-in once in a while—but no, he just gets hammered one meeting after another. And I'm tired of it, Frank! If I could only go back to work! But if I get an engagement, then Eddy will go playin' the goat—he's jealous of everybody about the place from the bandmaster down to the carpenter's boy —and that makes me unpopular—and there we are, don't you see! I'm worn out with it. But if I could have eight hundred a year, or even six hundred or five at a pinch— God knows, my wants are simple enough!— and have it paid to me personally, do you see —why, then, life would be worth livin'. Now, what do you say?"

Frances looked moodily down at her distinguished sister, her lips twisted in stormy amusement. "Why not say a thousand and be done with it?" she demanded between set teeth, after an ominous pause. "One would be as intelligent as the other. And oughtn't I to set your Eddy up with a racing stud while I'm about it? It's true that I have about twenty pounds a year for my own personal use, and Tom has a standing grievance that

I don't give even *that* to him—but don't let that interfere with your plans. Whatever you feel that you would like, just give it a name. Couldn't I lease one of the new Kaffir mansions in Park Lane for you? Or would you prefer something in Grosvenor Square?"

Cora gazed up with such intentness at her unnatural sister that a bright little tear came to shine at the corner of each eye. She put up her veil then, and breathed a cautious sigh. "I didn't expect this of you, dear," she said, submissively. "Of course it's the old story—La Cigale, and 'go-to-the ant-thou-sluggard' and all that. I don't see myself why a typewriting machine should make one so fearfully stony-hearted; you get callouses on your fingers, I know, but you needn't get 'em on your sisterly affections, one would think. But however"—she wiped her eyes, drew down her veil and allowed a truculent note to sound in her voice—"however, if you won't play, why then neither will I. I've been at pains to put this youngster in your way, but it won't be much trouble to shunt him out again. You mustn't think you can walk on me indefinitely, Frank. I'm the best-natured woman in the world, but even I draw the line somewhere."

"Draw it now then," said the other, with stern promptitude. "Go away, and take your friend with you and let me get to my work. I don't know what business either of you had coming here, at all." As she spoke, she moved to the outer private door, and turned the key in the lock. "You can send for the flowers," she added, "or I will have them taken over to Charing Cross Hospital—whichever you like."

Cora rose, her veiled face luminous with a sudden inspiration. "You can't quarrel with me, dear, no matter how hard you try." She spoke in low, cooing tones—a triumph of sympathetic voice production. "You're hard as nails, but I know you're straight. I will trust my interests absolutely in your hands. I leave it to you to do the fair thing by me."

"The fair thing?" echoed Frances, in dubious perplexity. She puzzled over the words and their elusive implication. "Your interests?" she repeated—and saw Cora move round her to the unlocked door, and open it—and still sought to comprehend what it was all about. Only when her sister, smiling cordially once more, bent forward without warning and pressed her veiled lips against her chin, and with a gentle "Good-bye, dear!" stepped into the shadows with-

out, did she recall the other features of the situation.

"Here!" she called, with nervous eagerness, yet keeping her voice down, "you're not to run off like this. Take your man with you."

"Softly, dear!" Cora enjoined her, from the dusk of the hallway. "Your young women wouldn't understand. No—I caught him for you, and I leave him in your hands. I'm not in the least afraid to trust it all to you. Bye-bye, dear."

Frances went out and glared down the staircase, with angry expostulation on her tongue's end. But there was nobody to talk to. She could hear only the brisk rustle of Cora's skirts on the stone steps, a floor below—and even that died away beneath the clatter of the machines inside.

Returning over the threshold, she paused, and looked impatiently at the flowers, and at the impassive, slumbering face beyond them. After a little, the lines of vexation began to melt from her brow. In a musing way, she put a hand behind her, and as if unconsciously closed and locked the hall door again. Then she moved to the table, picked up some of the loose blossoms and breathed in their fragrance, still keeping her thoughtful gaze upon the young man. She

found the face much older and stronger than she remembered it—and in a spirit of fairness she said to herself that it seemed no whit less innocent. But then perhaps all sleeping faces looked innocent; she could recall that Cora's certainly did. Holding the carnations to her lips and nostrils, she examined in meditative detail the countenance before her—delicately modeled, dark, nervously high-spirited even in repose. Associations came back as she gazed—the tender eagerness of the lad, the wistful charm with which his fancy had invested England, the frank sweetness of the temperament he had disclosed to her. He had been like a flower himself on that mellow autumn day—as fresh and as goodly to the eye as these roses on the table. But a winter had intervened since then—and what gross disillusionments, what roughening and hardening and corroding experiences had he not encountered! You could not tell anything by a face in sleep; again she assured herself of that.

Why, when one came to think of it, it was enough that Cora had brought him—or sent him, it mattered not which. Whence had she dispatched him?—from some theatrical dance or late supper. It was true that he was not in evening dress—and the thought

gave her pause for a moment. But he had been at some place where those wretched cousins of his were present—for Cora had spoken of keeping both Eddy and Gus "off his back"—whatever that might mean. And it was Cora herself who had told him to go to Covent Garden and buy these flowers!

Frances, revolving these unpleasant reflections, discovered all at once that the young man, without betraying by any other motion his awakening, had opened his eyes and was looking placidly across the flowers into her face.

She caught a quick breath, and frowned slightly at him.

CHAPTER XIX

"I don't think I like your being here," Frances remarked to the young man after a brief frowning inspection. She spoke slowly, and with a deliberate gravity and evenness of tone.

Christian's wide-open eyes continued to gaze up at her with that disconcerting look which had in it both remote abstraction and something very intimately personal. His glance expressed a tender pleasure as it maintained itself against hers.

"Oh, but I like it so very much!" he murmured, with a pleading smile.

Then, by a sudden movement, he sat up, flushing in a novel embarrassment. "I beg you to pardon me," he urged, faltering over his words. "I was not wholly awake, I think; or I was trying to persuade myself that it was still a dream. Do not think me so rude, I pray you!"

She signified by a gesture and momentary facial relaxation that this particular detail of the situation need not detain them.

"But"—she began, in her stiffest and least

amiable voice, and then hesitated. She put her knee again upon the chair, and, resting her hand on its back, looked dubiously at him. "I hardly know what to say," she started once more, and stopped altogether.

"Oh, but it is I who must say everything," he broke in, eagerly. "I am quite awake now—I see, of course, it is all absurd, meaningless in your eyes, till I explain it to you." He rose to his feet and put forth his hand as if to offer it in greeting. No responsive token being visible on her set face, or in her rigid posture, as she confronted him, he waved both hands in a deprecatory movement over the table laden with flowers between them. "These are my peace-offering," he said, with less confidence. "I hoped they would say some things for me—some things which I feel within me, and cannot easily put into speech. That is what I expected they would surely do. But"—he finished with dejection, after another glance into her face—"evidently they are as tongue-tied as I am. I see it was not a happy thought in me to bring them—or to come myself!"

She had followed his words with rapt attentiveness—but at the end seemed to remember only one of them. "The 'thought,'" she said, coldly. "Yes, that is

what I do not understand. What was the thought?"

He regarded her with some perplexity. "What was the thought—my thought?" he repeated. "Oh—since it does not explain itself, what good is there in talking about it? Let us say that there was no 'thought' at all. I will make my compliments and apologies — and say good-morning — and nothing at all will have happened."

"No," she answered reflectively. "That would be stupid. You have been to expense, and evidently to some inconvenience as well, to do this thing. On second thoughts," she went on, with an apparent effort to modify the asperities of her tone and manner, "I dare say that I haven't behaved quite nicely to you. If you remember, I told you a long time ago that bad manners was a failing of mine."

"I remember every little word that you spoke," said Christian softly.

Frances hardened her voice on the instant. "But that doesn't help me to understand why—what this is all about."

He responded slowly, searching for his words as he went along. The rattle of machines in the next room for the first time came into the conversation, and forced him to lift his voice. "You were my last friend

in France—my first friend in England," he began. "I said I would not forget you, and you have been always in my mind—always somewhere secure and fresh and sweet in my mind. It was only last night that I learned where I might find you. You will remember that when I begged you to tell me, you laughed and would not. I must not make you believe that I did not very soon find out your name or that I could not have learned your whereabouts much earlier. All I say is that I did not forget—and that last night, when the chance came naturally to me, I asked and learned what I desired to know. And then — why, then — this knowledge spread upward to be of more importance than all the other things I knew. I went home—but never to think of sleeping, but only to change my clothes and hasten out again, to get some new morning flowers for you, and to come to you at the earliest moment. I did not know that London rose so late—I arrived before the time, and, so it seems, waiting for your coming, I fell asleep. That is the entire story. You see it is not very complicated—it is by no means extraordinary."

Frances had listened with a dreamy gentleness in her gray eyes. She started slightly when he stopped, and gave him a

keen, cool glance. "The entire story?" she queried. "I think you have forgotten to mention that it was my sister who told you about me, and gave you my address."

Her prescience in no wise astonished Christian. Imagination had thrown round the Minerva-like figure which personified her in his thoughts, such a glamour of intellectual radiancy, that it seemed quite a natural thing for her to divine the obscure, and comprehend the mysterious. He smiled at her as he shrugged his shoulders. "It did not occur to me as important," he exclaimed. "It is true, however, that she told me. She did not know the address when I asked her, but later she procured it for me from her brother. It was at a supper at the Hanover Theater. Afterward there was dancing on the stage. I fear it would have been rather tiresome for me if I had not met your sister. She is a very friendly lady, and she talked a great deal to me."

"About me?" demanded Frances, sharply.

"Oh, no—about you only a few pleasant words; not more. It seems you do not meet very often."

He spoke with such evident frankness that she hesitated over the further inquiry her mind had framed. At last she put it in altered form. "Then you would not say

that she sent you here—that she told you to come—and to come by way of Covent Garden, and buy these flowers?" The question, as she uttered it, was full of significant suggestion about the nature of the reply desired. Its tone, too, carried the welcome hint of a softened mood, under the influence of which Christian's face brightened with joy.

"Why, not at all!" he cried, lifting his voice gaily above the typewriters' clatter. "She did speak of Covent Garden, and the show of flowers there in the early morning, but it was not in the least with reference to you. It was my own idea long after she had gone. Oh, no one would be more surprised than that good sister of yours to know that I am here!"

Frances, with a puzzling smile which ended in a long breath of relief, took up some of the roses and held them to her face.

"Sit down again," she bade him, with a pleasant glow in the eyes regarding him over the blossoms; "sit down, and let us talk. Or does that noise bore you?"

"Oh, I am too glad!" he assured her, beamingly. "If it were cannon firing in the next room, it would be nothing to me." Then, as he continued to gaze with delight at her, an inspiration came to him. "Or is

it possible for you to come out? Would you walk a little while, perhaps on the Embankment?"

"I am not particularly busy this morning," she made indirect answer. Then a digression occurred to her. "But I am rather surprised," she observed, "to find that England hasn't made more changes in your speech. I would have expected a perfect Piccadilly accent, but you talk exactly as you did on the train and the boat."

He laughed and clapped his hands for glee. "It is wholly because I am with you again," he declared. "Everybody has said for months that the foreign traces had quite vanished from my tongue—but the first glimpse of you—ah! they come instantly back! It is the association of ideas, beyond doubt—that very sweet association," he added, with trembling softness, "of oh! such fond ideas."

She had taken up her hat. "We will go out for a little, if you like," she remarked rather abruptly.

"And I am altogether forgiven?" he demanded in high spirits, as he rose. "You consent to accept the flowers?"

"Heaven only knows what I shall do with them," she answered, with a grimace of mock despair. "But it was ever so nice of

you to get them, and I thank you very much. Oh, I must tell Connie to sprinkle them before I go."

She moved to the inner door, and as she opened it turned. "Wouldn't you like to come and see the factory at work?" she inquired, and he joined her with alacrity. "It isn't much to see at the moment," she explained, as they entered the large room. "We have nine machines, but only four of them are needed just now. Until after the Jubilee, I'm afraid things will be very dull with publishers and playwrights. However, one must take the lean with the fat."

Christian looked somewhat nervously about him, while his friend stepped aside to confer with the girl whom he remembered from the early morning. Both this young lady and the three at their machines made a rapid, and as it seemed to him, perfunctory survey of their mistress's guest, and bent their attention upon their duties again as if his presence signified nothing whatever to them. He suspected that in reality they were plunged in furious speculation concerning him; and this embarrassed him so much that he turned and strolled back toward the open door and even entered the office before Frances rejoined him.

When she came back to him, she took from

the table a couple of pale, half-opened tea-rose buds, gave one to him to fix in his lapel and pinned the other to the breast of her fawn-gray frock. "If you are ready," she said, smilingly, and led the way to the staircase. As she descended before him, he noted the intelligent simplicity of this dress she wore—how it fitted her as gracefully and as artistically as Poole ever fitted Dicky Westland. About her hat, the carriage of her head and shoulders, the free decision of her step, there was something individual which appealed directly to him—a charm which would not be duplicated by any other person in the world. He looked at his watch as he went down, and found with surprise that it was nearly eleven.

He stepped to her side at the street doorway, with a meaning gesture. "Do you remember," he said, gently—"on the boat you took my arm?"

"I think London is a little different," she answered, decisively enough, yet with the effect to his ears of unreserved camaraderie.

They walked slowly down to the end of the street. "Do you mind which way we go?" she asked him, and turned eastward. "I haven't seen the city in an age," she remarked, as if the choice needed explanation. Sauntering along, they found little to

say to each other at the outset. What words they exchanged were about the mild, sunless sky of the London April, and the wonderful pencilings and rubbings of soot upon the silver-gray of London's stone walls. Learning that he was a stranger to the Temple, she led the way through the gate and lane, and then, by turnings which it surprised him to find her knowing so well, to the curious little church. The door in the sunken porch was ajar, and they went in. She pointed to the circle of freestone Crusaders looking complacently up from the floor at the Oriental dome which had caught their traveled fancy ages before, and it occurred to her to say: "Is it not interesting to you to think that there were Torrs who were friends and companions of these very Magnavilles and Mareschalls, six hundred years ago?"

He thrust out his lips a little. "I have not much interest in anything concerning the Torrs," he answered.

She looked up at him with curiosity, but offered no comment. They left the church, and she led him round to the spot where, amid the cracked old flags from forgotten graves, Oliver Goldsmith's tomb now finds itself. A crumbling wreath of natural flowers showed that some kindly soul had

remembered the date of the poet's death, three weeks before.

Christian displayed scarcely more interest here. "I have not read his 'Vicar of Wakefield,'" he confessed to her. "I had always the intention to do so, but it—it never came off."

"That brings me to one thing I wanted to ask you," she said, as they retraced their steps. "What books have you been reading—since you came to England? I am anxious to know?"

"Not many," he admitted with an attempted laugh which ended rather shamefacedly. "Reading did not fit itself very readily into my time. At Lord Chobham's I read in some old books, and at Emanuel's too, but it was all about our own people—the Barons' War, and the Wars of the Roses, and the Civil War. I know something about these and about the old families of the West, but not much else. I should have read more, I know, but there was really not much opportunity. But you—I saw at your office what serious books you read. It is what I should like to do, too—sometimes. But there has been no one to talk with about any kind of books."

They had come out again to the Embankment, and made their pace now even more

deliberate. "I have been thinking a great deal about you, and your future, since we met," she remarked, after a pause. "It has made me wonder what you would do, when the opportunity came to you—and what it would be open for you to do. That is why I began reading the books that I take it you have in mind—but afterward I read them for their own value. At the beginning"—she went on slowly, studying the sky-line in an abstracted way as she walked—"at the beginning I thought I should see you again sometime, and I had the idea that I wanted to be able to advise—or no, not that, but to talk to you, and try to interest you in the right sort of things. But it did not take me long to see how foolish that was."

"No, no!" urged Christian; without, however, any convincing display of enthusiasm. "There is no one in the world from whom I will so gladly take advice as you."

She smiled fleetingly at him. "And there is no one in the world," she replied, "more firmly resolved not to offer you any."

"Ah, but if I beg it! You may not offer—but will you refuse to give?"

"What is the good?" she broke forth in a louder tone, speaking as if in annoyed reproof to herself. "No person can think

or feel or decide for another! It is nonsense to pretend otherwise. A man must think his own thoughts, follow his own nature! We can ask nothing finer of a man than to honestly be himself. I get so angry at all these ceaseless attempts to run people all into one mold, to make everybody like everybody else—and then, here I was, solemnly starting out to do the very trick myself!" She laughed in ironical self-depreciation at the thought

Christian drew closer to her side. "I have very many things to say to you," he began gravely. "But I am in one way sorry that we went into the churchyard, because it has made us melancholy, and I was going to tell it all to you in the highest good spirits. We were both laughing like merry children when we left your place—and now we are sad. I like Emanuel's idea—he will have no tombs to be seen upon his estate. Death will come there as elsewhere, without doubt, but he will not be allowed to remain hanging about, thrusting his ugly presence upon happy people each time they walk in the street. At Emanuel's there is cremation—and that is the end of it. That is the portion of his System which pleases me most. It is the best thing in it."

She looked into his face. "Then you are

not wildly in love with his whole System?" she asked.

"Me? I grieve to say not. It is no doubt very admirable indeed—but—how shall I say?—it does not appeal to me. You are displeased with me for confessing it—but—"

"Displeased?" she interrupted him, with a meaning laugh. "Nothing could displease me less!"

"Oh, you do not love the System?" he cried, with dancing eyes.

"I hate it!" she answered, briefly.

"Capital!" He halted, to shake her by the hand with gay effusion. "Let us abuse it together! You shall say it all, however, because I only dislike it, and cannot give any reasons why—but you will know them every one. Oh, this is splendid! I had the right instinct when I came to you! I have a great deal to tell you—but first you must tell me: what do you say about my cousin's System? I am burning to hear that."

It was impossible to evade the contagion of his sparkling face. She laughed in turn.

"Oh, it would be too long a story," she half protested. "But to put it briefly, this is my idea. Emanuel seems to me to be a magnificent character, with one extraordinary limitation. I think it must be a Jewish limitation —for I have seen it pointed out that they do

not invent things. That is Emanuel's flaw; he has not an original thought in his head. He merely carries to a mathematical point of expansion and development the ready-made ideas which he finds accepted all about him. What you see in him is a triumph of the Semitic passion for working a problem out to its ultimate conclusion. When you consider it, what has he done? Merely discovered, by tremendous labor and energy, the smoothest possible working arrangement of the social system which his class regards as best for itself, and hence for all mankind—the system which exalts a chosen few, and keeps all the rest in subjection. My dear sir, things do not rise higher than their source! How did the Torrs come by their estates? By stealing the birthright of thousands of dumb human beasts of burden, and riveting the family collar round their necks with no more regard for their wishes or their rights than as if they had been so many puppies or colts. And what was the origin of the Ascarel fortune? The most frightful and blood-stained human slavery in the poisonous jungles of the Dutch East Indies—that, and an ancient family business of international usury, every dirty penny in which if you followed it far enough, meant the flaying-

alive of a peasant, or the starvation of his little children. These are the things which your cousin inherits. He is fine enough to be ashamed of them, but he is not broad enough to repudiate them. He makes himself believe that they were wrong only in degree. He will admit that the Torrs were too brutal toward their serfs, the Ascarels too selfish with their millions. That is all. And he sets himself to proving that with the right kind of chief at their head these systems of theirs can be made not only respectable, but even profitable to the slaves as well as the master. He does not see that the systems themselves are crimes!"

"Yes, I am glad that I came to you," said Christian, in low, earnest tones, in the pause which followed. The girl, breathing deeply under the fervor of her mood, looked fixedly before her toward the copper-haze above Paul's dome. He watched the noble immobility of her profile and thrilled at its suggestion of strength.

"To do him justice," she went on, musingly, "he does not pretend that it is progress. He is honest, and he describes it as reaction—a long step backward. It is just that kind of honesty and devotion, plus wrong-headedness, which keeps us all at sixes and sevens. If we agree that there is

no better-intentioned man alive than Emanuel—still he would do more harm than the most atrocious blackguard, if he had his way with the world. But fortunately, he will not have it. A vastly greater and loftier Jew has said that you cannot pour new wine into old bottles."

They walked on for a little in silence. "Have you been to Emanuel's place then?" Christian asked at last.

"No; I know it only from hearsay, and from his books. A woman novelist for whom I do work has been there, and she has told me a good deal about it. She is going to use it in a book, and would you believe it? she is crazy with enthusiasm about the whole thing. I tried to point out to her what she was doing, but you might as well talk to the east wind. The way women run after the hand that smites them, and beslaver it with kisses—that is the thing that enrages me most of all. Why, the very corner-stone of Emanuel's System is the perpetual enslavement of women. I am always surprised, when I hear about his mediæval arrangements, that he hasn't set up a ducking-stool for his women-folk. I'm sure it's a pure oversight on his part. Well, what are you to expect when cultivated women like Mrs. Sessyl-Trant turn up as

frantic admirers of that sort of thing? However, thank goodness, women are not forever to be sold out by the fools of their own sex. It is impossible not to see that the tide has turned at last. There *is* a change—and I think something genuine and lasting is going to come out of it. I really think it!"

"Ah, that is what I feel," put in Christian, with confused eagerness. "I have no clear thoughts about it, but it is my deep feeling that—that—what shall I say?—we are most at fault in the matter of the women."

Frances pursued her thought, in frowning meditation. "It is the new professional class, who earn their own living, who will help us out. These women, who have come through the mill of self-responsibility, will not accept the old nonsense invented for them, and imposed upon them by the women parasites. The younger women who take care of themselves have all begun to ask questions: 'Why should I do this?' 'Why shouldn't I do that?' 'And whose business but my own is it if I do the other?' Unfortunately, they are too ready to accept the first answer that comes to them. Oh, that is the woeful trouble! Men have slowly built up for themselves a good deal of machinery by which they can find out what is true. I

don't say they are not continually deceived, or that they invariably recognize the truth when they see it, but still they have certain facilities for protecting themselves against falsehoods. But women have practically none at all. They are systematically lied to from their cradle to their grave. They read so hard!—they are *the* consumers of novels, religious books, weekly newspapers, magazines, and the rest of it—but never a word of actual truth is allowed to reach them out of it all. Wherever they turn to inquire about themselves, about their rights and their duties in this world that they have been born into, they encounter this vast, unbroken conspiracy of liars. That is the gravest of all the disadvantages they labor under. Why, take even the 'New Woman' fiction of a few years ago. There was a great hullabaloo raised over certain novels; at last, they cried, the truth was being revealed by women, for women, of women. But what nonsense! It turned out not to be the truth at all, but only the old falsehood, disguised in hysterics and some shocking bad manners. There seems no escape for women anywhere. They are lied to by their parents, their parsons, their doctors, their authors—and of course they lie to one another. They have a whole debased currency of insincer-

ities and flattering falsehoods which they pass among themselves, keeping straight faces all the while as if it were honest money.—But as I said, I think a change is coming. However, don't let's talk any more about it. I get too angry!"

"I like you to be angry—only not with me," commented Christian with a sprightly smile. Then he added, more gravely, "Oh, I can see how the women who work will make a change. It was very curious to me to see those girls at the machines in your office. It was one of them who let me in, before you came. She was quite different from any of the English women I have been meeting. One saw that she had thoughts of her own—an atmosphere of her own. I should not like to tell lies to her; I think she would detect them more rapidly than I could get them out."

"Oh, Connie," laughed Frances. "Yes, she has a head on her shoulders. They are all fairly bright girls, and they get on together extremely well. It's quite their own idea to divide up the work equally among the lot, and when there is not much doing to take turns in working alternate days. I think it was rather fine of them."

"Ah, that is the class of women one would

like to help," he declared. "That is what I will devote myself to."

"But it is the class which prefers to help itself," she explained quietly. "I see no way in which you could 'help' them, as you call it. They don't want any help. Men in their position might take tips, but these girls won't." As he received the rebuff in silence, she changed the subject. "I am meeting now some other young women who would interest you. They are doing newspaper work—and doing it on its merits, too, and not by the favoritism of editors and proprietors—and one or two evenings a week we all get together at my office and talk things over. Sometimes there are as many as twenty of us, including my girls. In a year or two, perhaps it will run to a club-room of our own. I don't know that I told you—I am getting into newspaper work myself. If I saw how to combine it with my office business, I could have a place on a regular daily staff. I'm puzzling a good deal to find some way of making the two things go together."

"Oh, I envy you!" broke in Christian, impulsively. "You have work to do! You are interested in your work! You find in it not only occupation, but the opportunities of being useful to others, and of making

your life, and other people's lives, worth living. But think of me! I have nothing in the wide world to do, except wait for a very strong old man to die. And when he dies, then still I have nothing to do worth doing. Don't you see that it is the most miserable of existences? I am filled with disgust for it. I cannot bear it another day. And that is what I was going to tell you. I have decided to leave it all—and go away."

Frances paused for a moment to scrutinize, with slightly narrowed eyes, the excited face he turned to her. "How will going away improve matters?" she asked him, upon reflection.

He put out his lips, and shrugged his shoulders. "At least I shall be a free man," he affirmed.

Unconsciously she imitated his gesture in turn: "It does not follow that a deserter is necessarily a free man."

He flushed and winced visibly under the words, and turned away biting his lips. Then, the vexation clearing from his face, he wheeled again, and regarded her with calm gravity.

"There is no one else who could say that to me and not injure me," he answered, simply. "But that is the characteristic of you—when you say such a thing to me, then

it becomes a thing that should have been said. Yet perhaps it is not the final word, after all. Ask yourself what it is that I am deserting! Consider whether I should give up or gain something. Here in England it is possible for me to be one of two things—the conventional person of position like all the others, or the exceptional kind of being which Emanuel desires to make of me. I have been at school for half a year learning what it is that society in general expects a man in my situation to do. Now that I have learned it, frankly it makes me sick at heart. But then I have been at another school for a month, observing and studying what it is that Emanuel wishes me to undertake. We have agreed that that is not to be thought of, either. Then what am I to do?"

"But how does running away solve the difficulty?" She put the question to him with gentle persistency.

"Ah, but, you see," he rejoined, argumentatively, "it is not alone a moral difficulty. There are practical questions, too. When I announce to Emanuel that I reject his plans for my future, then I am left to myself to be that most ridiculous of objects —a man with a great station and no money to keep it up. That is what I must be here in England. But in other countries, that

will not be the case. There will always be enough money for me to live like a prince upon—so long as I travel about, in my own yacht if I like, or reside simply and happily in the beautiful places of the earth, here and there, as the fancy possesses me. Thus I can put to use the prestige of my title, when it is of advantage to do so—but only in so far as it is needful at the moment—and at the same time it does not become a burden to me in any degree. Now think carefully of this—is it not the wisest course for me?"

She seemed not to pause for thought at all. "Oh, that depends upon how you define wisdom," she replied, promptly. "There is the wisdom of the serpent, but fortunately there are many other kinds. No, I must say, you haven't convinced me in the least. However, you mustn't think that is of importance. You are under no obligation to convince me, surely!"

"Ah, but that is everything to me," he insisted. "There are reasons—which I wish to explain to you."

He could not keep a new meaning out of the glance with which he enforced this assurance. They had strolled round to Ludgate Circus, and come to a halt on the corner, with their backs turned upon a window full of droll phrenological charts and

symbols. He consulted his watch once more. "I breakfasted so lightly, and so early," he said—"it is not luncheon time quite, but that will give us a table to ourselves. You will come across with me, will you not? There are truly important things which have not been said—which I much wish to say."

After a moment's reflection she nodded her assent.

CHAPTER XX

Christian and Frances ate their luncheon in an upper chamber, close to a kind of balcony window, which gave upon one of the city's most crowded thoroughfares. An unceasing and uniform uproar—overridden from time to time by the superior tumult of a passing railway train on a bridge near by—rose from this indefatigable street. They had the room to themselves; the portentous din magnified the effect of the solitude in which they regarded each other, crumbling the bread on the table absent-mindedly, and waiting for the inspiration of speech.

"When I get back," the girl said at last with a smile, "the racket of my typewriters will seem like the murmur of a gentle breeze down a leafy country lane."

They laughed—but they had discovered it was not so hard to make oneself heard as they had supposed. Their voices intuitively found a level which served their personal needs, yet did not incommode the waiters yawning at the head of the stairway outside.

"Have you taken to the bicycle?" she was moved in sheer irrelevance to ask him. When he shook his head, she went on: "It is a wonderful thing for women. It has done more for them in three years, than all the progressive intellectual movements of civilization did in three hundred. We all use them, coming to and from the office. We have to store them down in the area, now—but I am going to find a better place."

Christian rolled his bread crumbs into balls and stared at them in a brown study, from which this topic was powerless to arouse him.

"I wish," he said, finally—"I wish very much that I knew how to convince you. But I seem never to produce any impression upon you. You are unyielding to the touch. It is I who get molded and kneaded about whenever I come close to you. And I don't say that it is not for the best. Only—only now, you will not accept my own ideas of what I should do, and you will not tell me what your ideas are."

"I am not sure that I have any ideas," she assured him. "It is merely that, on general principles, I don't care for the people who settle difficulties by turning tail and running away from them."

"Very well," he began, as if an impor-

tant premise had been accepted. "But as to my special case, I have stated what must be my position if I remain in England. To me it seems that it must be impossible—intolerable. But you have some different view, evidently. That is what I beg you to explain to me. If I am to remain in England, what is it your idea that I should do?"

She knitted her brows a little, and took time to her reply. "You seem to think so entirely of yourself," she said, slowly, "it is very hard to know what to say to you. I cannot put myself, you see, so completely in your place, as you are always able to do."

He opened his eyes wide, and informed their gaze with a surprised reproach. "There you are surely unjust to me," he urged, pleadingly. "I do not know any one who thinks more about other people than I do. One hesitates to say these things about oneself—but truly you are mistaken in this matter. In fact, I wonder sometimes if it is not a fault, a weakness in my nature, that I am so readily moved by the sufferings and wrongs of unhappy people. Whenever I see injustice, I am beside myself with a passion to set it right. I grow almost sick with indignation, and pity, when these things come before me. Last night, for example, at the Empire ——"

Christian stopped abruptly, with the sudden consciousness that the ground was not clear before him. He saw that he was entirely without a clue as to what his companion's views on the subject might be. That was her peculiarity: he knew concerning her thoughts and inclinations only what she chose to reveal to him. It was beyond his power to predict what her attitude would be on any new topic. Looking at her thoughtful, serene-eyed face, it decidedly seemed to him that the Empire, as an ethical problem, might with advantage be passed by. He hesitated for a moment, in the friendly shelter of the street noise, and then gave another termination to his speech: "It puzzles me that you should have that view of my temperament."

"Ah, that is just it—you have put the word into my mouth. It is 'temperament' that you are thinking of—and about that you are perfectly right. Your temperament is as open to the impulses of the moment—kindly, generous, compassionate and all that—as a flower is to the bees. But character is another matter. What good do your fine momentary sentiments, these rapid noble emotions of yours, do you or anybody else? You experience them—and forget them. The only thing that abides permanently with

you is consideration for your own personal affairs."

"This is all very unjust," he said, disconsolately. "I come to you for solace and friendship, and you turn upon me with beak and claws." He sighed, with the beginning of tears in his bright eyes, as he added: "There is more reason than ever, it seems to me, why I should go away from England! It is not kind to me!"

His doleful tone and mien drove her to swift repentance. "Oh, I have only been saying the disagreeable things first, to get them out of the way," she sought to reassure him. "There isn't another unpleasant word for you to hear, not one, I promise you."

"It is my opinion that there have been enough," he ventured to comment, with a rueful little smile. A measure of composure returned to him. "But if they must be said, I would rather they come from you than from any one else, for I think that you have also some pleasant thoughts about me."

She nodded her head several times in assent, regarding him with an amused twinkle in her eyes meanwhile. "Yes—the right kind of editor could make very interesting stuff indeed out of you," she said, and smiled almost gaily at his visible failure to comprehend her figure. "What I mean is—you are

too much sail, and too little boat. You drift before every new wind that blows. There is lacking that kind of balance—proportion—which gives stability. But, dear me, it is a thousand times better to be like that, than to have an excess of the other thing. The man of the solid qualities, without the imagination, simply sticks in the mud where he was born. But with you—if the right person chances to get hold of you, and brings the right influences steadily to bear upon you, then there is no telling what fine things you may not rise to."

"You are that right person!"

He lifted his voice to utter these words, with the air of feeling them to be momentous. His eyes glowed as they reaffirmed the declaration to her inquiring glance. But she seemed to miss the gravity of both words and look.

"Oh, there you're wrong," she said, half jestingly. "I'm too bad tempered and quarrelsome to exert any proper influence over any one. Why, I should nag all the joy and high spirits out of you in no time at all. No—you need an equable and happy person, really very wise and strong and sensible, but above all with an easy, smooth disposition—such a person, for example, as Emanuel's wife is described to be."

"No—I need no one but you!" he repeated with accentuated deliberation.

This time she appeared to feel something of his intention. She looked into the gaze he was bending upon her and then withdrew her eyes precipitately, and made a show of active interest in her food.

"I am asking you to think of joining your life to mine," he went on, in low, yet very distinct tones. "You cannot know a hundredth part as well as I do, how profoundly I need such help as you can give. You are the one woman in the world who means strength as well as happiness to me. If you could only dream with what yearning I long always to lean upon you—to be supported by your fine, calm, sweet wisdom! To be upheld by you—to be nourished and guided by you—oh, that is the vision which I tremble with joy to think of! I am my own master for the first time to-day—I have taken my life into my own hands—and I lay it at your feet—dear lady—at your feet."

She rose abruptly while his last words were in the air, and turning, moved to the window. She had contrived by a gesture to bid him not to follow, and he could only gaze in mingled apprehension and hope at her back, the while she stood professing to scrutinize the shifting throng below.

The waiter brought in another dish, methodically rearranged the plates and went away again. To Christian's bitter disgust, two men entered and took seats at a table at the other end of the small room—and still she did not turn. He meditated calling her, or joining her on the pretense of announcing the cutlets—and only stared in nervous excitement instead.

Then, as suddenly as she had left him she returned, and resumed her chair as if nothing unusual had happened. His strenuous gaze swept her face for tokens of her mood —of her inclination or decision—but beyond a spot of vivid red on each smooth cheek, there was no sign of any sort. Her frank, calm gray eyes met his with unruffled directness; they had in them that suggestion of benignant tolerance which he had discerned there more than once before.

"You do not answer me!" he pleaded, after a few mouthfuls. As his back shielded the action from the strangers, he put forth a cautious hand to touch the nearest of hers, but she drew it gently away beyond his reach. They automatically adjusted their voices to the conditions created by the newcomers.

"There could be only one possible answer," she told him, softly, almost

tenderly. "It is a very flattering dream—to me—but it is a mere empty dream, none the less. I hope you will not want to talk about it any more."

"But I swear that it is not empty at all!" he urged, in earnest tones. "Who has a right to say that it is a dream? I am my own master—so are you. We are of age—we are intelligent people. I deliberately come to you, and say to you that you are the one woman on earth whom I desire with all my heart for my wife. I open my mind to you. There is only the image of you inside it. You know my sincerity. You must feel how supreme is the place you have in my thoughts. It is the logical end toward which I have been walking ever since I first saw you! You are all that there is of true friendship, of true womanhood, for me! I put out my hands to you, I pray to you! And why will you not come to me, dear, dear Frank?"

There was a touch of pathos in the smile she gave him. "It isn't the least bit of good, I assure you," she made answer, in the confidential murmur that was necessary. "One can't talk here—but please let us speak of something else. Or can we not go now?"

He went on as if she had not spoken, his big, dark eyes challenging hers to an encounter which she evaded. "Do not

think we need go away from England, if you want to stay; there will always be money enough—with your wisdom in controlling it. Perhaps we may even be able to restore Caermere. But if we are not, still it can be one of the noblest and most beautiful residences in England, when we learn together to understand its charm, and make it our home. Oh, when you see the magnificent hills and forests shutting it in on all sides—and the grim, fine old walls and towers of the castle itself! But there we need live only when we choose to do so—and whenever the mood comes to us, off we can roam to the Alps or Algiers, or the wonderful India which one always dreams of. And we shall sail in our own yacht and you shall be the queen there, as everywhere else. And all our lives we will spend in doing good to others: do you not see what extraordinary opportunities for helping those who need help you will have? Where now you are of service to one person, then you can assist a hundred! An army of grateful people will give thanks because of you—and I will always be the chief of them—your foremost slave, your most reverent worshiper! And then—think of the joy of a life in which no one has a share who is not pleasant and welcome to us! We will have no one near us who is

not our friend. Oh, I have not told you: that is why, this very morning, I decided to leave it all, and to make a new life for myself, and to spend it wholly with my real friends. It is loneliness, heart and soul loneliness, that has driven me to revolt. And in my despair I come to you—and I say to you that it is friendship that I cannot live without, and you are my oldest friend, my dearest, truest, most precious friend, and I beg you to come with me and we will go through the world together, hand in hand——"

She interrupted him by pushing back her chair and half rising. "If you will excuse me now," she said, nervously, "I think I must go. You mustn't trouble to come—I will say good-bye here."

He had risen as well, and now in trembling earnestness protested against her proposal. At the risk of attracting the attention of the strangers, he displayed such resentful opposition that she yielded. The waiter was summoned — and remained bowing in dazed meditation upon the magnitude of the change he had been bidden to keep for himself, after they had passed out and down the staircase.

She led the way at a hurried pace back across the Circus and to Blackfriars. At the

rounded beginning of the Embankment she paused, and for the first time spoke. "Really I would rather go back by myself," she told him. "It is only unhappiness to both of us —what you insist on talking about."

"But I do not think it is to be treated in this way," he declared with dignity. "If we speak of nothing else it is the highest and most solemn honor that a man can pay to any woman, that I have paid to you. I have the feeling that it should be more courteously dealt with."

"Yes, I know," she admitted, nodding her ready compunction. She tightened her lips and looked away from him toward the bridge, her brows drawn together in troubled lines. "I don't say the right thing to you— I know that better even than you do. You must not think I fail to appreciate it all— the honor, and the immense confidence, and all the rest of it. But when I have said that much—then I don't know in the least how to say the rest. Why can't we leave it unsaid altogether? I assure you, in all seriousness, that it can't be—and mayn't we leave it like that? Please!"

He regarded her with a patient yet proud sadness, waiting to speak till she had turned, and his glance caught hers. "I do not wish to become a nuisance to you," he said, his

voice choking a little, "but I think it would be better if you said everything to me. Then I shall not put my mind on the rack, to try and imagine your reasons." He let his lip curl with a lingering ironical perception of the fantastic with which his tragedy was veined. "It is very sweet," he went on—"your consideration for my feelings. But I have heard so many plain truths to-day, I think my sensibilities are in good training now—they will not suffer for a few more." Suddenly, as if the sound of his voice had unnerved him, he seized her arm, and confronted her surprised gaze with a reddened and scowling face. "What are you afraid of?" he demanded hoarsely. "Why not say it? I heard it only last night! It is forty years old, it is true, but they have wonderful memories in England. You are the one whom I have held to be my dearest friend—but go on! Say it to me! A little thing like friendship does not prevent you from thinking it! Why, then, you should have the courage to speak it out!"

Dimly, while she stared in his distracted countenance, the meaning of the wild talk dawned upon her. With a startled exclamation, she dragged her arm from his clutch, and drew back a step. Trembling in her agitation, her gray eyes distended them-

selves out of all likeness to their tranquil habit.

"Oh-h-h!" she murmured in dismay at him, and wrung her hands. "Oh-h! Stop! Stop! That is too horrible for you to think!"

Gaining coherence of thought and purpose, she moved impulsively to him, and in turn clasped her hand upon his arm. "Put that out of your mind!" she adjured him. "I could not look anybody in the face if you thought *that* of me. Oh, it is too terrible of you! How could you suppose that I could harbor such a thought? To blame you for something years before you were born!—to throw it into your face. And *me* of all people! Why, I have cried to myself at remembering what you said about your father when we first met—how your little-boy memory clung affectionately to the soldier-figure of him in the door-way! Look at me—I cry now to think of it! Why, it is the one thing about you that is sacred to me!—the one thing that you are perfect in—and then you imagine that I am capable of insulting you about it! Oh, heavens, why wouldn't you leave me when I told you to?"

She threw his arm from her in a gust of physical impatience, but the glance with which, on the instant, she corrected this demonstration, was full of honest compas-

sion. He groveled before this benign gaze, with bowed head and outstretched, pleading hands.

"Forgive me! Forgive me!" he groaned, brokenly. "I could not—at all—know what it was I said. I am too unhappy!"

"Well," she began, with a vehement effort at calmness, "let us say good-bye here. There are some Germans watching us from the hotel windows. Or it is better perhaps —will you walk on past the school?" As they moved forward, she recovered more of her self-possession. "I hope you will be able to remember something pleasant out of our morning," she said, and with a joyless laugh added, "but for the life of me, I don't know what it can be. Or yes, you can remember when you woke up, and I stood and scolded you, from above the flowers. I pretended to bully you, but really all the while I was thinking how sweet of you the entire thing was. And later, too—oh, there were several intervals in which I behaved civilly to you for whole minutes at a time."

He looked wistfully at her. Beneath the forced playfulness of her tone it seemed to him that something hopeful sounded. "Ah, dear friend," he murmured, drawing close to her—"think! — think tenderly in my behalf! Ask yourself—your kindest self—if

I must be really driven away. Why is it that I may not stay? I plead with you as if it were for my life—and is it not indeed for my life?—my very life?"

"No—Christian," she said, gravely, "it is not your life, nor anything like your life. You give big labels to your emotions, but in good time you will see that the things themselves are not so big, or so vital. And you mustn't yield so readily to all these impulses to mope and despair and to think yourself ill used. You must try to make for yourself a thicker skin—and to view things more calmly. And I don't want you to go away thinking hard things of me. Is it true that I always nag you—there is something in you which calls out all the bully in me—but I wish you would think of me as your friend. It gives me great pleasure when you speak of me as your oldest friend in England—for I have always liked you, and I am interested in you, and—"

"And why will you not marry me?" He interposed the question bluntly, and with a directness which gave it the effect of an obstacle in her path, isolated but impassable.

She halted, and studied the pavement in consideration of her reply. When she looked up, it was with the veiled elation of a disputant who has his counter-stroke well in

hand. "You said to-day that you had become your own master, and that you were a free man, with your life in your own hands. Very well. I also am my own master, and I am a free woman. My life is exclusively my own personal property, to live as I choose to live it. I value my liberty quite as highly as if I were a man. It does not suit me to merge any part of it in something else. There could be many other reasons given, no doubt, but they would be merely individual variations of this one chief reason—that I am a free woman, and intend to remain a free woman. I know what I want to do in the world, and I am going to try to do it, always my own way, always my own master."

He regarded her thoughtfully, bowing his head in token of comprehension. "But if —," he began, and then checked himself, with a gesture of pained submission.

"There are no 'ifs,'" she said, with resolute calmness, and held out her hand to him. Her control of the situation was undisputed. "We say good-bye, now—and we are friends —good friends. I—I thank you—for everything!"

He stood looking at her as she walked away—a sedately graceful figure, erect and light of step, receding from him under the

pallid green shelter of the young trees. Musingly, he held up the hand which still preserved the sense of that farewell contact with hers—and upon a sudden impulse put it to his lips and kissed it. Something in the action wrought an instantaneous change in his thoughts. All at once it was apparent to him that many things which should have been said to her he had left unsaid. In truth, it seemed upon reflection that he had said and done everything wrong. The notion of running after her flamed up in him for a moment. She was still in sight—he could distinguish her in the distance, stopping to buy a paper from a boy near the Temple station. But then the memory of her unanswerable, irrevocable "No" swept back upon him—and with a long sigh he turned and strode in the other direction.

Frances, hastening mechanically toward her office, found relief from the oppressive confusion of her thoughts in the fortuitous spectacle of two small newsboys fighting in the gutter just at the end of the Temple Gardens. For the first time in her life, the sight aroused nothing within her save a pleased if unscientific interest. She paused, and almost smilingly observed the contest. She found something amusingly grotesque in

tne pseudo-Titanic rage on these baby faces. The dramatic fury of the embattled infants was in such ridiculous disproportion to the feather-weight blows they exchanged! She found herself chuckling aloud at some incongruous comparison which rose in her mind.

Then, as the combatants parted, apparently for no better reason than the general volatility of youth, she remembered that she had it in mind to look at the "Star." One of her friends, Mary Leach, had sent to that paper some days before an article on "Shopgirls' Dormitories," and she was interested in watching for its appearance. It happened that one of the boys had a "Star." Acting upon some obscure whim, she gave them each a penny, quite in the manner of a distributor of prizes for conspicuous merit—and grinned to herself at the thought when she had turned her back on them and moved on.

There was no sign of what she sought on the front page. Opening the sheet, her eye fell, as it were, upon a news paragraph in a middle column:

"Death of the Oldest Duke.—The Shrewsbury correspondent of the 'Exchange Telegraph' announces the death at Caermere

Castle, at an early hour this morning, of the Duke of Glastonbury. His Grace, who was in his ninetieth year, had until last summer enjoyed the most vigorous health, and only now succumbs to the prostration then occasioned by the group of domestic bereavements which at the time created such a sensation. The deceased nobleman, who for the great part of his prolonged life, was one of the best known sportsmen in Shropshire, succeeded his father as eighth duke in his minority, and had been in possession of the title for no less than seventeen years when Her Majesty ascended the throne, thus constituting a record which is believed to be without parallel in the annals of the peerage. His successor is stated by Whitaker's Almanac to be his grandson, Mr. Christian Tower, but the current editions of Burke, Debrett and others do not mention this gentleman, whose claims, it would appear, have but recently been admitted by the family."

Frances read it all, as she stood at the corner, with a curious sense of mental sluggishness. Her attention failing to follow one of the sentences, she went back, and laboriously traced its entire tortuous course, only to find that it meant no more than it had at first.

It seemed a long time before she connected the intelligence on the printed page with the realities of actual life. Then she turned swiftly, and strained her eyes in the wild hope of discovering Christian still on the Embankment. She even took a few hurried steps, as if to follow and overtake him—but stopped short, confronted by the utter futility of such an enterprise.

Then, walking slowly, her mind a maze of wondering thoughts, she went her way.

CHAPTER XXI

Christian strolled aimlessly about for a long time in the closely packed congeries of streets, little and big, behind St. Paul's. It happened to be all new ground to him, and something novel was welcome to his troubled and restless mind. He loitered from one window to another, examining their contents gravely; at the old book stalls he took down numbers of volumes and looked laboriously through them, as if conducting an urgent search for something.

His jumbled thoughts were a burden to him. He could get nothing coherent from them. It was not even clear to his perception whether he was really as dejected and disconsolate as he ought to be.

He had only recently been plunged into despairing depths of sadness, and it was fitting that he should still be racked with anguish. Yet there was no actual pain—there was not even a dogged insensibility to the frivolous distractions of the moment. He became exceedingly interested in an old copy of Boutell, for example, and hunted

eagerly through the multitude of heraldic cuts to see if the white bull on a green ground of the Torrs was among them. His disappointment at not finding it was so keen that for the instant it superseded his abiding grief. His discovery of this fact entertained him; he was almost capable of laughing in amusement at it. Then, in self-condemnation, he sought to call up before his mental vision the picture of Frances, as she had looked when they had said good-bye. The image would not come distinctly. Her face eluded him; he could only see her walking away, instead, under the feeble green of the young trees. None the less, he said deliberately to himself that he was unhappy beyond the doom of most men, and that the hope had gone out of his life.

The day had turned out unexpectedly warm. In the middle of his shapeless musings, the ornate sign of a Munich brewery on a cool, shaded doorway suddenly attracted him. The dusky, restful emptiness of the place inside seemed ideally to fit his mood. He went in, and seated himself with a long sigh of satisfaction at one of the tables. Here, in this mellow quiet, over the refreshing contents of the big, covered stone mug, he could think peacefully and to advantage. He lit a cigar, and leaning back

in comfort, gave the signal to his thoughts to arrange and concentrate themselves.

What should he do next? Yes—that was far more to the point than mooning over the irrevocable past. He had left Duke Street with hardly any plan beyond not returning thither. Luggage of some sort he would have to have—changes of linen and the like, and the necessary articles of the toilet. It was his intention to buy these as the need of them arose—and the character of his purchases would also depend a good deal, of course, upon the decision he should come to concerning his movements. He had said that he would leave England—and now he asked himself whether there was anything to prevent his departure that very evening. One of the deepest charms of travel must be to start off on the instant, upon the bidding of the immediate whim, and descend upon your destination before there has been time to cheapen it by thinking about it. Why should he not eat the morrow's breakfast in the Hague — and dine at Amsterdam? Similarly, he could within twenty-four hours be watching the marriage of Mosel and Rhine at Coblenz—or gazing upon the wide, wet, white sands of the Norman shore from the towering battlements of St. Michel. A hundred storied towns, vaguely pictured in

his imagination, beckoned to him from across the Channel. Upon reflection, it seemed to him that Holland offered the most wooing invitation. He asked the waiter for Bradshaw, and noted the salient points of the itinerary from Queenborough.

It was now three o'clock. There was plenty of time for all purchases, and a leisurely dinner before going to Victoria. It occurred to him that the dinner must be very good—a luxurious kind of farewell repast.

He would make a memorandum now of the things he ought to buy here in London. Holland was by all accounts a dear place—and moreover he had heard that the Dutch customs examination was by no means troublesome. It would be more intelligent to complete practically his outfit here. He took out a pencil, and began feeling in his coat-pocket for a bit of paper. The hand brought out, beside Lady Milly's note about the Private View, three or four unopened letters. He had entirely forgotten their existence—and stared at them now in puzzled indecision. It was not a sensible thing, or a fair thing either, to tear up and destroy unread the message which some one else had been at pains to transcribe for you. But on the other hand, these missives belonged to

the stupid and intolerable life in Duke Street, with which he had definitely parted company. It might even be said, in one sense, that he was not the person to whom they were addressed.

By some whimsical freak of the brain, he suddenly asked himself whether he should not go to Greece instead of Holland, and enlist as a volunteer in the war against the Turks. He became on the instant immersed in adventurous military speculations. He had not fallen into the English habit of following the daily papers with regularity, and he was conscious of no responsibility whatever toward the events of the world at large, as Reuter and the correspondents chronicled them. Something of this new war in Thessaly, however, he had perforce read and heard. Of the circumstances and politics surrounding this latest eruption of the Eastern Question he knew little more than would any of the young Frenchmen of education among whom he had spent his youth. But in an obscure way, he comprehended that good people in Western Europe always sympathized with the Christian as against the Moslem. It seemed that some generous-minded young Englishmen were already translating this sympathy into action; somewhere he had seen an account

of a party of volunteers leaving London for Athens, and being cheered by their friends at the station. Now that he thought of it, the paper in which he had read the report had ridiculed the affair as an undesirable kind of a joke—but the impulse of the volunteers seemed fine to him, none the less.

There ought to be some martial blood in his veins; the soldier-figure of his father rose before him in affirmation of the idea.

But no—what nonsense it was! If ever there had been a youth bred and narrowed to the walks of peace, he was that young person. He who had never struck another human being in his life, that he could remember—what would such a tame sheep be doing in the open field, against the unknown, ferocious Osmanli Turk? The gross absurdity of the picture flared upon him, momentarily—and then the whole notion of armed adventure had vanished from his mind.

His attention reverted to the letters—and now it seemed quite a matter of course that he should open them. The first three were of no importance. The fourth he regarded with wide-open eyes, after he had grasped the identity of the writer. He read it over slowly, more than once:

"27A Ashley Gardens, S. W., Monday.

"My Dear Mr. Christian Tower: I have taken this little place in town for the time being, and I shall be glad to see you when you are this way. To-morrow, Tuesday, is a day when I shall not be at home to other people—if you have nothing better to do.

"Yours very sincerely,

"Edith Cressage."

Nothing better to do? Christian's thoughts lingered rather blankly upon the phrase—until all at once he perceived that there could not possibly be anything better to do. He rose with decision, hurriedly gulped what remained of his second pot of beer, paid his bill and marched out with the air of a man with a mission.

In the hansom, he read the letter still again, and leaned backward to see as much as possible of himself in the little mirror at the side. His chin could not be described as closely shaven, and his garments were certainly not those of the afternoon caller. The resource of stopping at Duke Street occurred to him—but no! that would be too foolish. The whole significance of the day would be abolished, wiped out, by such a fatuous step. And he repeated to himself that it *was* a day of supreme significance. By comparison with the proceedings and experiences of this long and crowded day,

the rest of his life seemed colorless indeed. And what was of most importance in it, he declared to himself, was not its external happenings, but the fine and novel posture of his liberated mind toward them. He was for the first time actually a free man. His enfranchisement had not been thrown at him by outsiders; it proceeded from within him—the product of his own individuality.

That was what people would discern in him hereafter—a complete and self-sufficient personality. He would no longer be pointed out and classified as somebody's grandson—somebody's cousin or grand-nephew. The world would recognize him as being himself. He felt assured, for example, upon reflection that Lady Cressage would not dream of questioning the fashion of the clothes in which he came to see her. She would perceive at once that he had developed beyond the silly pupilary stage of subordination to his coat and hat. She was so clever and sympathetic a woman, he felt intuitively, that these symbols of his emancipated condition would delight her. It was true, he saw again from the mirror that his collar might be a little whiter; his cuffs, too, had lost their earlier glow of starched freshness. But these were trifles to serious minds. And besides, was it not all in the family?

There was a momentary block at the corner of Parliament Street, and here a newsboy thrust a fourth edition upon Christian with such an effect of authority that he found a penny and took the paper. It was the "Westminster Gazette," and when he had looked upon the second page for a possible drawing by Gould, and had skimmed the column of desultory gossip on the last page, which always seemed to his alien conceptions of journalism to be the kind of matter he liked in a newspaper, he laid the sheet on his knee, and resumed his idle reverie. To his great surprise the cabman's shouts through the roof were necessary to awaken him at Ashley Gardens. He shook himself, laughingly explained that he had been up all night as he paid his fare, and ascended the steps of 27A, paper in hand.

The servant seemed prepared for his coming, for upon giving his name in response to her somewhat meaning inquiry, she led him in at once. He sat waiting for a few moments in a small and conveniently appointed drawing-room, and then stood up, at the rustle of rapid skirts which announced Lady Cressage in the half-open doorway.

She entered with outstretched hand, and a radiant welcome upon her face.

Christian noted that beyond the hand there

was a forearm, shapely and cream-hued, disclosed by the lace of her flowing sleeve. There were billows of this lace, and of some fragile, light fabric which seemed sister to it, enveloping the lady, yet her tall, graceful figure was in some indefinable way molded to the eye beneath them all. The pale hair was as he had first seen it, loosely drawn across her temples; there were warm shadows in it which he had not thought to see. The face, too, had some unexpected phase, here in the subdued light of the curtained room. There was a sense of rosiness in the rounded flesh, a certain reposeful elation in the regard of the blue eyes, which put quite at fault the image of harrowed restlessness and nerves he had retained from Caermere. It was in an illuminating second that he saw all this, and perceived that she was very beautiful, and flushed with the deep consciousness that she read his thoughts like big print.

"It was the greatest cheek in the world—my summoning you like this," she said, as they shook hands. "Yes—sit here. Put your hat and paper on the sofa. This is my only reception room—but we might have a little more light."

She moved to the window, to pull back the curtains, and then about the room,

lightly rearranging some of the chairs and trinkets—all with a buoyant daintiness of motion which inexpressibly charmed him. "These are not my things, you know," she explained over her shoulder. "I am not trying in the least to live up to them, either. I take the place, furnished, for three months, from the widow of an Indian officer. You would think she would have some Indian things—but it might have all come direct from Tottenham Court Road. It's impossible to get the slightest sensation of being at home, here. One could really extract more domesticity out of four bare cottage walls. Or no, what am I saying?"—she had returned, and sinking into the low chair opposite him, pointed her words with a frank smile into his face—"it *is* a bit like home—to see you here!"

"I am very glad to be here," he assured her, nodding his unfeigned pleasure. "But it seemed as if you would never tell me I might come."

"Oh, I was worried to death. There were all sorts of things to see about when I first came up," she explained with animation. "And I had the feeling that I didn't want you to come till I had smoothed some of my wrinkles out, and had achieved a certain control over my nerves. It was not fair to

myself—the view you had of me at Caermere."

The view of her that was afforded him here brought a glow of admiration to his eyes.

"To think of your being my cousin!" he said, with some remote echo in his own voice of the surprise which he recalled in Dicky Westland's tone. It seemed wonderful indeed as he looked at her, and smiled. He shook his head presently, in response to her question whether he had any recent news from Caermere, and continued to observe her with a rapt sense of the miraculous being embodied before his eyes.

"But the duke is very low indeed," she told him in a hushed voice. "I had it yesterday from—from one of the household."

The tidings barely affected him. That side of his mind was still fast in the rut of last night's mutiny.

"I have quite decided to go away," he announced, calmly. "I get no good out of the life here. It does not suit me. Whatever comes to me, why, that I shall accept, but to use it in my own way, living my own life. Now that I am a free man, it astonishes me that I did not rebel long ago."

"Rebel—against what?" she asked him, with a kind of confidential candor which put him even more at his ease.

"Oh, against everything," he smiled back at her. "This existence that they arranged for me—it is like being embalmed and wrapped in mummy-cloths. Personally I do not survive a thousand years—but I am but one link in a long chain of respectable people who have lived like that, without living at all, for many thousands. It is being buried alive. Why, you will see what I mean—a man is a creature different from other human creatures. He has an individual nature of his own. His tastes, his inclinations, his impulses and ideas, are not quite like those of the people about him. He would be happy to follow these according to his own wishes. But then everybody seizes upon him and says: 'No, you must be and do just like the rest. You will be noticed and disliked if you indulge in even the slightest variation. These are the coats you are to wear, and the hats and caps and neckties. This is Duke Street, which you must live in. This is the hour to get up, this is the hour to make calls, this is the corner of your card to turn down, this is the list of people at whose houses you must dine, these are your friends ready-made for you out of a book.' And truly what is it all?—utter, utter emptiness. You are really not alive at all! You have no more personal sensation

of your own existence than an insect. It is all this that I rebel against."

She reclined a little in her chair, and covered him with a meditative gaze. "I know the feeling," she commented thoughtfully. "I used to have sharp spasms of it—oh, ages ago—whenever a shopwoman showed me something, and said, 'This is very much worn just now,' or, 'We are selling a great deal of this.' Then I would not have that particular thing if I died for it. But do you really feel so earnestly about it?" She put the question in deference to a gesture by which he had signified the inadequacy of her comparison. "Ah, the real life, as you call it, is a more complicated thing than one fancies."

"But that is precisely the point," with vivacity. "I have thought much about that. Is it not the artificial life which is complicated instead? Do we not confound the two? If you consider it, what can be more simple that the natural life of a man? If an astronomer, for example, has a difficult problem to work out, he first busies himself in discovering and putting aside all the things which seem to be factors in it but really are not. One by one he gets rid of them, until at last he has the naked equation before him—and then a result is possible. But with us, it

seems that we go quite the other way about it. We take the problem of life—which is extraordinarily simple to begin with—and we pile upon it and around it thousands of outside rules and conventions and traditions, and we confuse it with other thousands of prejudices, and insincerities, and old mistakes that no one has had the industry to examine—and then we look with embarrassment at what we have done, and shake our heads, and say that the problem is too hard, that it passes the wisdom of man to solve it."

"I wish you joy of solving it," she remarked, after another reflective survey of his face. "I am sure I wish some one would do it. But you spoke of going away. How would that help matters?"

The recurrence of the question startled him. He looked at her with lifted head, recalling swiftly meanwhile the tone in which Frances had uttered those same words. A blurred, imperfect retrospect of the morning's events and talks passed fleetingly across his mind—and its progress disquieted him. Some tokens of perturbation on his face seemed to warn her, for she went on without waiting for an answer.

"I am not surprised to find you feeling like this," she said. "It is quite the effect that I imagined London would produce upon

you. I have no right to say so, perhaps, but it seemed to me from the start that it was being badly managed—I mean the way you were sent here by yourself, and given nothing to do except follow about where Lord Lingfield led. It is not what I should have done—but the truth is that Emanuel knows nothing at all about the characters and temperaments of human beings. If men agree with him, he thinks they are good men, and if they disagree with him, they are bad men—or at least not worth thinking about at all."

"I had quite resolved not to commit myself to his System," Christian informed her, "even before I made up my mind to—to take other steps."

His closing euphemism seemed to attract her attention. "What is it you intend to do?" she asked of him, softly. She sat upright again, with an air of friendly curiosity.

In the face of this query, he discovered that his intentions were by no means so clear to himself as they had been. "It is still rather in the air," he said vaguely. "But we talk always of myself! Tell me, instead, about yourself! It is an infinitely more pleasing subject. You are here in London for only three months? And you are alone here?"

She smiled in an indefinite fashion, and leaned back in her chair. "Ought I to have a chaperon? I dare say. But there is no room for her here. The flat accommodates just one solitary elderly lady and here you behold her. Oh, I am a hundred years old, I assure you!"

He could only wave his hand at her in genial deprecation. "Oh, who is younger than you?" he murmured.

She sighed. "By the almanac I am four-and-twenty," she went on, with a new note of gentle melancholy. "But by my own feelings, I seem to have been left over from the reign of William the Fourth. And really, it is not my own feelings alone—when I go out, I observe that very old men take me down to dinner, and talk to me precisely as if I were a contemporary of theirs."

"When we were together at Caermere," interposed Christian, "you confessed to me that you were not happy—and it was my great delight to pledge myself that if ever there was anything I could do—"

"Oh, there is nothing at all," she interrupted him to declare. "My case will not come up. It has all been settled. The accounts, or settlements—or whatever you call them—have been made up, and my share

of my husband's share of his father's interest in *his* father's estate has been ascertained. I have six hundred a year for life. It is a mild and decorous competence. I do not complain. It will keep a genteel roof over my head here in London, or a small house and a pony-trap in the country. It will run to a month at a pension in the cheaper parts of Switzerland, or perhaps even to a lodging and a bath-chair at Brighton, when it is not quite the season. Oh, I shall get on very well indeed—at all events," she added with a touch of bitterness, "much better than I deserve to do."

Christian lifted his brows in protesting inquiry. "You always speak in that tone of yourself! It pains me to hear you. I cannot think of any one who deserves the kindness and friendly good offices of fortune more than you."

Lady Cressage gave an uncertain little laugh. "You are too generous-minded—too innocent. You do not know. Me? My dear friend—I have committed the unpardonable sin! I humiliated and degraded myself to win a great prize in the world's lottery—and I did not bring it off. That is my offense. If I had won the trick—why, they would be burning incense before me! But I lost instead—and they leave me quite by

myself to digest my own disgust. I don't talk about it—I have never said as much to any living soul as I am saying to you—I don't know why I am telling you—"

"Is there any one else who would listen with such sympathy?" Christian heard himself interjecting.

"But it is too cruel," continued Lady Cressage, "too shameful a story! I was not happy at home. It was nobody's fault in particular; I don't know that we were more evil-tempered and selfish among ourselves than most other middle-class households with four hundred a year, and three daughters to marry off. I was the youngest, and I had the sort of good looks which were in fashion at the moment, and mamma worked very hard for me—pretending to idolize me before people though we yapped at each other like fox-terriers in private—and I was lucky in making friends—and so I went swimming out on the top of the wave that season, the most envied poor fool of a girl in London. And when Cressage wanted to marry me—I was dizzy with the immensity of what seemed to be offered me. My parents were mad with pride and ecstasy. Everybody around me pretended a kind of holy joy at my triumph. I give you my word!—never so much as a whisper came to

my ears of any shadow of a reason why I should hesitate—why I should think a second time! Do you see? There was not an honest person—a single woman or a man with decency enough to warn an ignorant girl of her danger—within reach of me anywhere. They all kept as silent as the grave—with that lying grin of congratulation on their mean faces—and they led me to be married to the beast!"

She had sat erect in her chair as she spoke, and now she rose to her feet, motioning him not to get up as she did so. She took a restless step or two, her shoulders trembling with excitement, and her hands clenched. "Ah-h! I will never forgive them the longest day of my life!" she called out.

Then, with a determined shake of her head, she seemed to master herself. Standing before a small mirror in the panel of a cabinet against the wall, she busied her beautiful hands in correcting the slight disorder of her hair. When she turned to him, it was with a faint, tremulous smile surmounting the signs of stress and agitation upon her face. She sank into the chair again, with a long-drawn breath of resignation.

"But it isn't nice to abuse the dead," she remarked, striving after an effect of judicial

fairness in her voice. "I didn't mean to speak like that. And for that matter, why should I speak at all of him? One doesn't blame a wolf for man-eating. You execrate instead the people who deliberately throw a helpless human being to the wolf. I even say to myself that I have no quarrel with Cressage. He was as God made him—if the thought isn't blasphemous. He was a great, overgrown, bullying, blubbering, ignorant boy, who never got beyond the morals of the stables and kennels, and the standards of taste of the servants' hall. One could hardly call him vicious; that is to say, he did not deliberately set out to cause suffering. He did not do anything on deliberation. He acted just as his rudimentary set of barbaric impulses prompted him to act. Some of these impulses would have been regarded as virtues in a more intelligent man. For example, he was wildly, insanely jealous of me. It took the most impossible and vulgar forms, it is true, but still——"

"Oh, need we talk of him?" It was with almost a groan of supplication that Christian stopped her. "He is too unpleasant to think about. Nothing that I had heard of him before made me sorry that he was dead —but this—it is too painful. But now you are a free woman—you see your path well

before you, to travel as you choose. And what will you do?"

She sighed and threw up her hands with a gesture of contemptuous indifference. "What does any English lady with six hundred a year do? Devote her energies to seeing that she gets—let me see, what is the sum?—to seeing that she gets twelve thousand shillings' worth of respectable discomfort, and secures reasonable opportunities for making those about her uncomfortable also. Oh, I don't in the least know what I shall do. The truth is," she added, with a sad smile, "I have lived alone with my dislikes so long, and I have nourished and watered them so carefully, that now they fill my whole garden. They have quite choked out the flowers of existence—these thick, rank, powerful weeds. And I haven't the energy—perhaps I haven't even the desire—to pull them up. They seem appropriate, somehow—they belong to the desolation that has been made of my life."

Christian bent forward, and made a movement as if to take one of the hands which lay dejectedly in her lap. He did not do this, but touched a projecting bit of lace upon one of the flounces of her gown, and twisted it absent-mindedly in his fingers instead.

"You are still unhappy!" he said reproach-

fully, his eyes glowing with the intensity of his tender compassion. "I do not forgive myself for my inability to be of help to you. It is incredible that there is not something I can do."

"But you are going away," she reminded him, in a soft monotone. "You have your own unpleasantnesses to think of—and you are occupied with plans for rearranging your life on new lines. I only hope that you will find the happiness you are setting out in search of. But then men can always get what they want, if they are only sufficiently in earnest about it."

"It is not entirely settled that I shall go away," said Christian. He twisted the lace in the reverse direction, and hesitated over his further words. "That was only one of several alternatives. I am clear only about my resolve to make a stand—to break away. But if I remained here in England—in London?"—He looked with mingled trepidation and inquiry into her face. "If I did not go abroad—is there anything I could do?"

She regarded with attentiveness the hand which was playing havoc with her flounce—and it straightway desisted. She continued to study the little screwed-up cone of lace, in meditative silence. At last she shook her head. "You must not give it another

thought," she said, but with no touch of dictation in her musing tone. Her eyes dwelt upon him with a remote and ruminating gaze. "I belong to a past generation. My chances in the lottery are all exhausted —things of the past. You must not bother about me. And I think you ought to give up those ideas of yours about breaking away, as you call it. London hasn't been made pleasant for you, simply because the wrong people have gone the wrong way about it to arrange matters for you. But there are extremely nice people among the set you know, if you once understood them. With your position, you can command any kind of associations you wish to have. After it is all said and done, I think England has its full share of cultivated and refined people of intelligence. I have not seen much of the Continent, but I do not believe that it possesses any superiority over us in that respect."

"But in your own case," urged Christian, somewhat hazily; "you said that there were no honest people about you to warn you— though you were in the best society. That is my feeling—that you do not get the truth from them. They do not lie to you—but they are silent about the truth."

"Is it different elsewhere?" she asked,

gravely. "Is not the young girl sold everywhere? Do you think that marriage is a more sacred and ethereal thing among the great families of France or Austria or Germany than it is with us? I have heard differently."

"Oh, we are all equally uncivilized about women," he admitted. "I feel very strongly about that. But you, who have such knowledge and such clear opinions—would you not love to do something to alter this injustice to women? The thought has been much in my mind, of late." He paused to reflect in fleeting wonderment upon the fact that only this morning he had been absorbed in it. "And my meaning is," he stumbled on, "there is nothing I would rather devote my life to than the task of making existence easier and broader and more free for young women. Could there be any finer work than that? I know that it appeals to you."

She looked at him with an element of doubt in her glance. "Nothing appeals very much to me—and I'm afraid my sex least of all. I do not like them, to tell the truth. I never get over the surprised disgust of waking up in the morning and finding that I am one of them. But this is rather wandering from the point, isn't it? I was urging you

to give over the notion of making a demonstration. You have waited thus long; be content to wait just a little longer. My private belief is that the Duke will not live the week out."

Still, the assurance seemed to suggest nothing to him. "But if he dies," he protested, "how then will I be different? I am lonely—I am like a forlorn man escaped on a raft from a shipwreck—I eat my heart out in friendless solitude. And if I have a great title—why, then I shall be more alone than ever. It is that way with such men—I have seen that they hold themselves aloof—and others do not come freely near them. It frightens me—the thought of living without friends. I say to you solemnly that I would give it all—the position, the authority and dignity, the estates, Caermere, everything—for the assurance of one warm, human heart answering in every beat to mine! Has friendship perished out of the world, then? Or has it never existed, except in the books?"

Her beauty had never been so manifest to him, as now while he gazed at her, and she did not speak. There seemed the faint, delicate hint of a tenderness in the classical lines of the face that he had not seen before. It was as if his appeal had brought forth some latent aptitude of romance, to mellow

the direct glance of her eyes, and soften in some subtle way the whole charm of her presence. A new magic was visible in her loveliness—and the sense that his words had conjured it into being thrilled him with a wistful pride. No woman had thus moved him heretofore. The perception that she was plastic to his mental touch—that this flower-like marvel of comeliness and grace, of exquisite tastes and pure dignity of soul, could be swayed by his suggestion, would vibrate at the tone of his voice—awed him as if he were confronted by a miracle. His breath came and went under a dull consciousness of pain—which was yet more like pleasure. A bell sounded somewhere within the house, and its brief crystal resonance seemed somehow to clarify the ferment of his thoughts. All at once, as by the flooding of sunlight into a darkened labyrinth, his mind was clear to him. He knew what he wanted—nay, what all the years had been leading him up to desire.

With his gaze maintained upon her face—timidly yet with rapturous intentness, as if fearful of breaking the spell—he rose to his feet, and stood over her. A confusion of unspoken words trembled on his lips, as her slow glance lifted itself to his.

"It was like the pleasantry of a beautiful,

roguish little girl''—he began, smiling nervously down at her—''your saying that you belonged to a generation earlier than mine. Do you think I do not know my generation? And am I blind, that I do not see what is most precious in it? This is what——''

An extraordinary outburst of disputing voices, in the little hallway close at hand, broke in upon his words. He stopped, stared inquiringly at Lady Cressage, and beheld her rise, frowning and hard-eyed, and step toward the door. A vague sense of the familiar came to him from the louder of the accents outside.

The door was opened, and the domestic, red-faced, and spluttering with wrath, began some stammered explanation to her mistress. What she sought to say did not appear, for on the instant the door was pushed farther back, and a veiled lady took up her energetic stand upon the threshold.

''Don't blame her,'' this lady cried, in high, rapid tones. ''I forced my way in—something told me that you were at home. And when you hear my news——''

''Oh, since you are here''—Lady Cressage began, coldly. ''But, really, Mrs. Torr——''

''Oh, no—call me Cora!'' the other interrupted, vivaciously.

She went further, and bustling her arms against Edith's shoulders, purported to kiss her on both cheeks. Then, drawing back her head, she went on: "My dear, the duke died at two this morning! It's in all the papers. But what isn't in any of the papers is that the heir is missing. It's a very curious story. Mr. Westland here"—by her gesture it seemed that Dicky was behind her in the hallway—"went to Duke Street this noon, and found Christian's man in great alarm. The youngster had bolted, leaving a note saying merely that he was called away. Mr. Westland then hunted me up, and we started out, for I had a kind of clue, don't you see. I knew where he was at ten o'clock this forenoon—and we drove to Arundel Street, and there we found——"

Christian hurriedly stepped forward. "Oh, I think you may take it that I am not lost," he called out, revealing himself to the astonished Cora. For the moment the chief thing in his mind was satisfaction at having interrupted her disclosures about Arundel Street.

Then, as other thoughts crowded in upon him, he straightened his shoulders and lifted his chin. "It's all right," he said, with a reassuring wave of the hand toward the womenfolk of his family.

PART IV

CHAPTER XXII

On the morning of the funeral, six days later, Christian rose very early, and took coffee in his library shortly after seven. Then, lighting a cigarette, he resumed work upon several drawers full of papers, open on the big table, where it had been left off the previous evening. The details of the task seemed already familiar to him. He scanned one document after another with an informed eye, and put it in its proper pile without hesitation. He made notes suggested by the contents of each, on the pad before him, with a quill pen and corrected the vagaries of this unaccustomed implement, in the matter of blots and inadequate lines, with painstaking patience. There were steel nibs in abundance, and two gold stylographic pens, but he clung resolutely to the embarrassing feather.

After a time he rested from his labors, and rang the bell beside his desk; almost upon

the instant Falkner appeared in the doorway.

"If Mr. Westland is up," said Christian, "you may ask him to join me here."

"Yes, Your Grace," the smooth-voiced, soft-mannered man replied, and vanished.

The young duke rose, yawned slightly and moved to the window nearest him. It opened, upon examination, and he stepped out on a narrow balcony of stone which skirted the front of the square tower he had quitted. The outlook seemed to be to the northeast, for a patch of sunshine lay upon the outer edge of the balcony at the right. Breathing in delightedly the fresh May-morning air, he gazed upon the bold prospect of hills receding in lifted terraces high against the remote sky-line. He had not seen just this view from Caermere before—and he said to himself that it was finer than all the others. Above each lateral stretch of purplish-gray granite, to the farthest distance, there ran a band of cool green foliage—the inexpressibly tender green of young birch trees; their thin, chalk-white stems were revealed in delicate tracery against indefinable sylvan shadows.

Through the early stillness, he could hear the faint murmur of the Devor, gurgling in the depths of the ravine between him and the nearest hill. "To-morrow," he thought,

"will begin the true life! All this will be my home—mine! mine! and before anybody is up in the morning I will be down where that river of black water runs, and fish in the deep pools for trout."

Some one touched his elbow. He turned with a quick nod and smile to greet Dicky Westland. "I am up ages before you, you see," he said genially. "It was barely daylight when I woke—and I suffered tortures trying to remain in bed even till six. Oh, this is wonderful out here!"

"Awfully jolly place, all round," commented Dicky. He blinked to exorcise the spirit of sleep and gazed at the prospect with determined enthusiasm. "I haven't looked about much, but I've found out one thing already. There's a ghost in my room —and I think he must have been a professional pedestrian in life."

"Splendid!" cried Christian, gaily. "Have you had coffee—or it is tea you people drink, isn't it? Then shall we get to work? I want the papers out of the way before Emanuel comes. They will all be here between nine and ten. I wanted to send carriages to Craven Arms, but it seemed there were not horses enough, so hired traps are to be brought up from the station."

"Do you know who are coming?"

"Lord Julius, and Emanuel and his wife; the captain and his wife and brother; Lord Chobham, and Lord Lingfield—I don't know if any of their women will come—and Lady Cressage. Then there are some solicitors, and perhaps some old acquaintances of my grandfather's. At all events, Welldon has ordered four carriages and a break. There is to be breakfast at ten, and I shall be glad when it is all over—when everything is over. Do you know?—I have never been to a funeral in my life—and I rather funk it."

"Oh, they're not so bad as you always think they're going to be," said the secretary, consolingly. "The main thing is the gloves. I never could understand it—but black gloves are invariably about two sizes smaller than ordinary colors. You want to look out for that. But I dare say your man is up to the trick—he looks a knowing party, does Falkner."

"I fancy I shall give him back to Emanuel," remarked Christian, thoughtfully. "He is an excellent servant, but he reminds me too much of Duke Street. Did you notice the old butler yesterday afternoon?—he stood at the head of the steps to meet us—that is old Barlow. I have a great affection for him. I shall have him valet me, I think."

"Isn't he rather venerable for the job?" suggested the other. "And wouldn't it be rather a come-down for a head butler? They're awfully keen about their distinctions among themselves, you know."

Christian smiled with placidity. "I think that the man whom I pick out to be nearest me will feel that he has the best place in the household. I shall be very much surprised indeed if that isn't Barlow's view. And of course he will have his subordinates. But now let us take Welldon's statement for the last half of '95, and the two halves of '96. Then we can get to the mine. Unless I am greatly mistaken, that is most important. I find that the mining company's lease falls in early next year. And won't you ring the bell and have Welldon sent up when he comes?"

Upon mature reflection Christian decided not to descend to meet his guests at breakfast. When he had dismissed the estate agent, Welldon, after a prolonged and very comprehensive interview, he announced this decision to Westland. "You must go down and receive them in my place," he said.

"I will say that you have a cold," suggested Dicky.

"By no means," returned Christian, promptly.

"It is not necessary to enter into details. You receive them—that is all. I have spoken with Barlow; he knows what to do with them in the matter of rooms and so on. I am breakfasting here. And afterward—say at eleven o'clock—I will see some of them here. There is an hour to spare then, before we go to the church. I am not clear about this—which ones to see first. There is that stupid reading of the will after we get back——"

"By George! do they do that still?" interrupted Dicky. "I know they did in Trollope and George Eliot—but I thought it had gone out."

"It is kept up in old families," replied Christian, simply. "In this case it is a pure formality, of course. There is no mystery whatever. The will was made in 1859, after the entail was broken, and merely bequeaths everything in general terms to the heir-at-law. My grandfather covenanted, at the same time, to Lord Julius to make no subsequent will save by his advice and consent—so that there can be no complications of any kind. I am thinking whether it would be better to see Lord Julius and Emanuel before the reading of this will or after. Really it makes no difference—perhaps it is better to get it over with. Yes—

say to them that I beg they will come to me here at eleven. You might bring them up and then leave us together—or no, they know the way. Let them come up by themselves."

Through the open window there came the grinding sound of wheels upon the gravel of the drive, around at the east front. At a gesture from the other, Dicky hurried away.

Left to himself, Christian wandered again to the casement, and regarded the spacious view with renewed interest. Falkner entered presently, bearing a large tray, and spread some covered dishes upon a cloth on the library table.

"How many carriages have come?" the master asked from his place at the window.

"Four, Your Grace—and a break with some wreaths and Lord Chobham's man and a maid—I think it is Lady Cressage's maid."

"Who has come—outside the family?"

"Three gentlemen, Your Grace—one of them is Mr. Soman. Barlow thinks they are all solicitors."

Christian mused briefly upon the presence of Lord Julius's man of business. Since that first evening of his on English soil, at Brighton, he had not seen this Mr. Soman. He remembered nothing of him, indeed, save his green eyes. And now that he

thought of it, even this was not a personal recollection. It was the remark of the girl on the boat, about his having green eyes, which stuck in his memory. He smiled, as he looked idly out on the hills.

The girl on the boat! Was it not strange that his mind should have applied to her this distant and chilling designation? Only a few days ago—it would not be a week till to-morrow—she had seemed to him the most important person in the world. A vision of his future had possessed him, in which she alone had a definite share. How remote it seemed—and how curious!

He recalled, quite impersonally, what he had heard in one way or another about her family. Her father was some sort of underling in the general post office—a clerk or accountant, or something of the kind. There was a son—of course, that would be the brother Cora had spoken of—and the ambition of the family had expended itself in sending this boy to a public school, and to the university. The family had made great sacrifices to do this—and apparently these had been wasted. He had the distinct impression of having been told that the son was a worthless fellow. How often that occurred in England—that everything was done for the son, and nothing at all for the

daughters! Then in fairness he reflected that it was even worse in France. Yes, but somehow Frenchwomen had a talent for doing for themselves. They were cleverer than their brothers—more helpful, resourceful—in spite of the fact that the brothers had monopolized the advantages. Images of capable, managing Frenchwomen he had known rose before his mind's eye; he saw them again accomplishing wonders of work, diligent, wise, sensible, understanding everything that was said or done. Yet, oddly enough, these very paragons of feminine capacity had a fatal unfeminine defect; they did not know how to bring up their sons. Upon that side they were incredibly weak and silly; it was impossible to prevent their making pampered fools of their boys.

Suddenly his vagrant fancies were concentrated upon the question of how Frances Bailey would bring up a boy—a son of her own. It was an absurd query to have raised itself in his mind—and he put it away from him with promptitude. There remained, however, a kind of mental protest lodged on her behalf among his thoughts. He perceived that in his ruminations he had done her an injustice. She was not inferior in capability or courage to any of the self-

sufficient Frenchwomen he had been thinking of, and in the matter of intellectual attainments was she not immeasurably superior to them all? The translucent calm of her mind—penetrating, far-reaching, equable as the starlight—how queer that it should be coupled with such a bad temper! She always quarreled with him, and bullied him, when they were together. Even when she was exhibiting to him the sunniest aspects of her mood, there was always a latent defiance of him underneath, ready to spring forth at a word. He remembered how, at the close of their first meeting, she had refused to tell him her name. He saw now that this obstinacy of hers had annoyed him more than he had imagined. For an instant it assumed almost the character of a grievance—but then his attention fastened itself at random upon the remarkable fact that he had seen her only twice in his life. Upon reflection, this did seem very strange indeed. But it was the fact—and in the process of readjusting his impressions of the past six months to fit with it, the figure of her receded in his mind, grew less as she moved away under a canopy of dull yellowish-green, which vaguely identified itself with the trees on the Embankment. She dwindled thus till he thought of her again,

with a dim impulse of insistence upon the phrase, as the girl on the boat. The transition to thoughts of other things gave his mind no sort of trouble.

He pondered some of these other things—formlessly and light-heartedly—while he stood at the library table, and picked morsels here and there from the dishes laid for him. His absence of appetite he referred tacitly to the warmth of the day, as it was sunnily developing itself outside. Here on this shaded side of the castle, it was cool enough, but there was the languor of spring in the air. He scrutinized this new library of his afresh. Until Barlow had opened it for him, shortly after his arrival yesterday, it could not have been used for years. Most of its appointments had a very ancient look; no doubt they must date back at least to the seventh Duke's time. It was incredible that his grandfather, the eighth Duke, should have been inspired to furnish a library. There were many shelves of apparently very old books as well, but there was also a vast deal of later rubbish—stock and sporting annuals, veterinary treatises, county directories and the like—which he would lose no time in putting out. He saw already how delightful a room could be made of it. It had the crowning merit of

being connected with the suite of apartments he had chosen for his own. From the door at the side, opposite the fine old fireplace, one entered the antechamber to his dressing-room. This gave to the library an intimate character, upon which he reflected with pleasure. Here he would come, secure from interruption, and spend among his books the choicest and most fruitful hours of his leisure. It was plain to him that henceforth he would do a great deal of reading, and perhaps—why not?—of writing too.

There was a rap upon the door, and then Falkner, opening it, announced Lord Julius and his son. They came in together, diffusing an impalpable effect of constraint. The elder man seemed in Christian's eyes bigger than ever; his white beard spread over the broad chest like a vine run wild. Emanuel, who lapsed in the wake of his father, was unexpectedly small by comparison. The shadows, where the two stood, emphasized the angular peculiarities of his bald head. His thin face took an effect of sallow pallor from his black clothes. Already he had his black gloves in his hands.

Christian stepped forward to meet them—and was suddenly conscious of the necessity for an apology. "I did not come down," he murmured, as he shook hands with a grave

smile—"I am not quite master of myself yet. It is still strange to me. But come to the window, and let us sit down."

They followed him, and took the chairs he pushed out for them. He perched himself on the corner of the big table, and lightly stroked the glazed boot of the foot which was not on the floor. "I am glad to hear that Kathleen has come," he said to his cousin. "I hope she is very well."

"Extremely so," replied Emanuel. Then, upon reflection, he added, "We had hoped that you would come to us, on your way down from London."

"There was so much to do in town," explained Christian, hazily. "My grandfather's lawyers came up at once from Shrewsbury, and it was necessary to see a good deal of them—and then there were the tailors and outfitters. It was all I could do to get away yesterday morning. And of course—by that time I was needed here." He turned to the other. "And you are very well, Uncle Julius?"

"I am well," said the elder man, with what Christian suspected for the instant to be significant brevity. The father and son had exchanged a look, as well, which seemed to have a meaning beyond his comprehension. But then he forgot these momentary doubts

in the interest of the discovery that there were tears in his great-uncle's eyes.

Lord Julius unaffectedly got out a handkerchief, and wiped them away. He looked up at the young man as through a mist. "I never dreamed that I should feel it so much," he said, huskily. "I am amazed at myself—and then ashamed at my amazement—but Kit's death has somehow put me about and upset me to a tremendous extent. There was thirteen years between us—but when you get to be an old man, that seems no more than as many weeks. And Emanuel"—he addressed his son with the solemnity befitting a revelation—"I am an old man."

Emanuel frowned a little in his abstracted fashion. "You are less old than any other man of your years in England," he protested.

Christian, listening, somehow found no conviction in these reassuring words. It dawned upon him suddenly that Lord Julius had in truth aged a great deal. The perception of this disarranged the speech he had in his mind.

"There are a thousand things to be talked over," he began, with an eye upon Emanuel, "but I do not know if this is quite the opportune time. I wished to lose no time in seeing you both, of course—but you will not

be hurrying away. No doubt there will be a better opportunity."

"I don't think it will be found that there is so very much to say," remarked Emanuel. A gentle but persistent melancholy seemed to pervade his tone.

"There is the complication"—Christian began again, and hesitated. "That is to say—you know even better and more fully than I do, to what a great extent I am in your hands. And there the complication, as I said, arises. I have been working very hard on the figures—with the lawyers in London, and here since I arrived—but before we touch those at all, I ought to tell you frankly, Emanuel: I do not see my way to meeting the conditions which you suggested to me last autumn, when we met first."

Emanuel seemed in no wise perturbed by the announcement. His nervous face maintained its unmoved gravity. "It was never anything more than a pious hope that you would," he commented. "I may add," he went on, "that even this hope cannot be said to have survived your first visit. Otherwise, I should have tried to have you see London under different auspices—through different eyes."

The calmness with which the decision he had regarded as so momentous met accept-

ance disconcerted Christian. He had mentally prepared for the defense of his hostile attitude toward the System—and, lo! not a syllable of challenge was forthcoming.

"But there remains, all the same, the principal difficulty," he said, thinking hard upon his words. "It does not lessen my obligations to you as my chief creditors." He looked from one to the other, as if in uncertainty as to which was the master mind. "You have both been very open with me. You have told me why it was that you devoted a large fortune to buying up the mortgages on the estate which is now mine —and to lending always more money upon it—until now the interest eats up the income like a visitation of locusts. But my knowledge of the motives does not help me. And you must not think, either," his confidence was returning now, and with it a better control over his phrases—"that I am begging for help. I look the situation in the face, and I do not feel that I am afraid of it. I see already many ways in which I can make a better fight of it than my grandfather made."

Lord Julius held up a hand. "Is there not a misconception there?" he asked, pleasantly enough. "A fight involves antagonists —and I intervened in poor Kit's affairs as a protector, not as an assailant."

Christian stood erect, and knitted his brows in puzzled thought upon both the manner and the matter of these words.

"But it is still the same," he persisted. "You were his good friend—as I know you are mine—or hope very sincerely that you are—but none the less you were his overwhelmingly big creditor, as now you are mine. If one is greatly in debt, then one struggles to get out. It is in that sense that I meant the word 'fight.' And, to repeat, I see many ways of making progress. I find that Welldon is not exclusively my man. He is the agent of three other estates as well, because we could not pay him enough here for all of his services. That I will alter at once. I find that we have no mineral bailiff. The company at Coalbrook has paid such royalties as it pleased, without check of any sort. We have the right to examine their books, but it has never been exercised. Next week my secretary and Welldon go to Coalbrook. I find that the company's lease of twenty-one years expires next February. Eh bien! It will be strange if I do not get ten thousand pounds hereafter, where less than four has come in hitherto. My lawyers already know of capitalists who desire to bid for the new lease—and the estimate of increase is theirs, not mine. But these are

details. I mention them to you only to show you that I am not afraid. But anxious, I do not deny that I am. I have not been bred to these things—and I may easily make mistakes. It would take a great load off my mind if—if, in some measure, you would be my advisers as well as my creditors."

"Why should you ever have doubted that?" asked Emanuel, in a tone of somber kindliness.

"Ah, but I do not mean advice about the management of the estate," put in Christian, with an over-eager instinct of self-defense. "I do not shrink from taking that completely on my own shoulders. I would not trouble you with anything of that sort. But of larger matters——"

"There is one large matter," interrupted Lord Julius, speaking with great deliberation, "which I find outweighing all others in my mind. It is not new to my mind—but to-day it pushes everything else aside. It is the thought of the family itself. I have told you this before—let me say it to you again. Everything that I have done—every penny that I have laid out—has been with this one end in view—the family. Yet this morning I have been thinking of it—and I am frightened. While poor old Kit lingered along, it was not so easy to grasp it, somehow

—but his going off makes it glaring. There are too few of us. I am alone in my generation—and so is Emanuel in his—and so are you in yours, save for those rowdy simpletons Eddy and Gus. And beyond you, there is only that little girl baby of Cora Bayard's! I want you to marry, Christian. I want to see sons of yours growing up here at Caermere—hearty, fine boys to carry the name of Torr along. That I am really in earnest about. By comparison with it, nothing else on earth matters—for us."

"Oh, I shall marry," Christian replied, in smiling seriousness. "Of course, that is the obvious thing to be done. And now"—he looked at his watch—"it is time for me to dress. It is arranged that you and Emanuel and Kathleen drive to the church in the carriage with me. It is not quite orthodox precedence, I know, but I could not bear to —to have it otherwise. And we will think no more about those other matters until to-morrow."

"Other matters," repeated Lord Julius, and exchanged a look with his son as they rose. "My dear Christian, there are no other matters."

"No—not till to-morrow," answered Christian, with a doubtful smile. "But then I am afraid there are a good many."

Emanuel filled in the pause. "Mr. Soman has brought all the papers," he said, with a flitting return to his lighter manner. "It is my father's meaning that the mortgages are extinguished."

Christian gazed from one to the other with a face full of stupefaction. His knees shook and sought to bend under him. Tremblingly he essayed to speak—and his lips would make no sound.

Lord Julius laid his big hand on the young man's shoulder—and Christian, dimly recalling the effect of this touch in the days when he had first known it, thrilled at the novel restfulness it somehow now conferred.

"Only show me a son of yours," said the old man, with tender gravity. "Let me see an heir before I die."

Without further words, the two left him. Christian, staring at the shadowed door through which they had vanished, remained standing. His confused brain quailed in the presence of thoughts more stupendous than the ancient hills outside.

CHAPTER XXIII

Several thousand people caught that day their first curious glimpse of the new master of Caermere. At the most there were but a handful of aged persons, in the throng clustered along the sides of the road winding down from the Castle to the partially restored medieval collegiate church in the valley, who could remember any other duke than the one being borne now to lie among his fathers. The fact that these venerable folk, without exception, were in the enjoyment of a day's holiday from the workhouse, might have interested a philosopher, had it been pressed upon his attention.

Quite two hundred horsemen, mounted in their own saddles on their own beasts, rode in the long procession which descended from Caermere toward the close of the noon hour. Clad in decent black for the greater part, with old silk hats or other formal and somber headgear, they jogged sedately in unison as the curbed horses stepped with caution down the hill. Their browned and large-featured faces wore a uniform mask of solemnity—distinguished chiefly by a reso-

lute contraction of brows and lips, and eyes triumphantly cleared of all traces of speculation. They looked down, as they passed, upon the humbler dalesmen and laborers of the hillsides, and their womenfolk and swarming children, with an impassive, opacated gaze.

On the green, before the little covered gateway to the churchyard, dull murmurs spread through this cortege, propelled sidelong from mouths which scorned to open; the main principles of a proposed evolution came slowly, in some mysterious way, to be comprehended among them: after almost less backing and pushing into one another than might have been expected, they perceived themselves emerging into an orderly arrangement, by which they lined the two sides of the carriage-way crossing the green They regarded each other across this significant strip of gravel with a gloomy stolidity of pride: the West Salop Yeomanry could scarcely have done it better. Then another rustle of whispered sounds along their ranks toward the church—and the civic side of their demonstration came uppermost. With a tightened left hand upon the reins, they removed their hats, and held them so that they could most readily read the names of the makers inside.

The carriages bearing the family of Torr, preceded by the curtained hearse, and followed by a considerable number of broughams and closed landaus recognizable as the property of the neighboring gentry, moved silently forward along this lane of uncovered horsemen. The distant swelling moan of the organ floated on the May air, in effect a comment upon the fact that the tolling of the bell in the tower had ceased.

The intermittent noise of carriage-doors being sharply shut, and of wheels getting out of the way, proceeded from the head of the procession at the gate—and tenants and other undistinguished people on foot began to press forward between the ranks. The horsemen, with furtive glances to right and left, put on their hats again, and let the restive animals stretch their muscles in the path. A few, dismounting, and giving their bridles over to boys, joined those who were moving toward the church. The majority, drawing their horses aside into groups formed at random, and incessantly shifting, lent their intellects, and in some restrained measure their tongues, to communion upon the one great problem of the day:—would the new Duke set the Hunt on its legs again?

The question was so intimately connected with their tenderest emotions and convic-

tions, that no one liked to speak of it thoughtlessly or upon hasty impulse. Even those who doubted most, shrank from hearing the prophecies of evil they felt prone to utter. Men who nourished almost buoyant hopes still hesitated to create a confidence which must be so precarious. While the faint sustained recitative of the priest in the church could be heard, insistent and disturbing like the monotone of a distant insect, and then the sounds of the organ once more, and of singing, fell upon the sunlit green, the horsemen spoke cautiously about the hounds. Even before Lord Porlock's death, things had not been what they should have been. The pack was even then, as one might say, falling between two stools. The Torrs hadn't the money to keep the thing up properly themselves, but they showed their teeth savagely the minute mention was made of getting in some outside help. But since Porlock's death—well, the condition of affairs had been too painful for words. The horsemen shook their heads in dumb eloquence upon this tragic interval. The Kennels had lapsed into a state hardly to be thought of, much less discussed. There had been no puppy-walk. Were there any young dogs at all? And, just heavens! if there were, what must they be like!

And yet the country-side, outraged as it felt itself to be in its finest feelings, beheld itself helpless. The old Duke—but really this was not just the time and place for saying what they felt about the old Duke They glanced uneasily toward the church when this theme suggested itself, and nodded with meaning to one another. It could be taken for granted that there were no illusions among them concerning *him.* But what about the new man? Eyes brightened, lips quivered in beseeching inquiry, at the mention of this omnipotent stranger. What was he like? Had anybody heard anything that Welldon had said about him? It seemed that he was French bred, and that, considered by itself, might easily involve the worst. But then, was there not a story that he had ridden to the hounds in Derbyshire? Perhaps the younger generation of Frenchmen were better fellows than their fathers—but then, there was the reported fact that the Duke of Orleans fell off his horse and broke his leg whenever he tried to ride. Sir George had been informed in Paris that he would have been King of France by this time if he had been able to stick in a saddle. Yet, when one thought of it, did not this very fact indicate a fine new public sentiment in France, on the subject of horse-

manship — and perhaps even of sport in general?

Christian, at the door of the church, had thought most of clenching his teeth, and straining his upper-arms against his sides, to keep from trembling. He had not pictured himself, beforehand, as entering this burial place of his ancestors alone. Yet, in the churchyard, that was how the matter arranged itself. His first idea had been to lead, with Kathleen on his arm—but she had said her place was with Emanuel instead. Then the alternative of walking arm-in-arm with Lord Julius had seemed to him even more appropriate—but this too, in the confused constraint of the moment, had gone wrong. Stealing an anxious half-glance over his shoulder, he discovered that Lord Julius had placed himself at Kathleen's other side. The slight gesture of appealing invitation which he ventured upon did not catch the old man's eye. There was nothing for it but to stand alone.

To be the strange, unsupported central figure in such a pageant unnerved him. He stood tremulously behind the pall—a burden draped with a great purple embroidered cloth, and borne upon the shoulders of eight peasant-laborers from the estate—and noted fleetingly that, so stunted and mean of

stature were these poor hinds, he looked with ease above them, over their load, into the faces of the two priests advancing down the walk toward him.

These persons, an elderly, dark man, with a red hood folded upon his shoulders, and a thin-faced fair young man, seemed to return the gaze with meaning. He caught himself feeling that their eyes deferred to him; yes, if they had bowed to the ground, the effect of their abasement before him could not have been more palpable. Looking perfunctorily across the chasm of death, their glances sought to make interest with the living. He hated them both on the instant. As they wheeled, and by their measured steps forward drew slowly in their wake the bearers of the pall, the chant of the elder—"I am the Resurrection and the Life"—came vaguely to his ears, and found them hostile.

The interior of the old church—dim, cool, cloistral—was larger than Christian had assumed from its outer aspect. Many people were present, crowded close in the pews nearest the door—and strangely enough, it was his perception that these were chiefly women, of some unlabeled class which at least was not his own, that brought to him of a sudden self-command. He followed the bier up the aisle to its resting-place before

the rail, took tacit cognizance of the place indicated to him by some man in professional black, and stood aside to let Kathleen pass in before him, all with a restored equanimity in which he was himself much interested. Through the reading of the Psalm and the Epistle he gave but the most vagrant attention to their words. The priests read badly, for one thing; the whining artificiality of their elocution annoyed and repelled him. But still more, his thoughts were diverted by the suggestiveness of everything about him.

Especially, the size of the funeral gathering, and of the mounted and wheeled procession, had impressed him. There need be no pretense that affection or esteem for the dead man had brought out, from the sparsely populated country round about, this great multitude. Precisely for that reason, it became a majestic fact. The burial of a Duke of Glastonbury had nothing to do with personal qualities or reputation. It was like the passing away of a monarch. People who cared nothing for the individual were stirred and appealed to by the vicissitudes of an institution. Inset upon the walls around him were marble tablets, and more archaic canopies of stone over little carved effigies of kneeling figures; beyond, at the sides of

the chancel, he could see the dark, rectangular elevations of the tombs, capped by recumbent mail-clad statues, with here and there a gleam of gilt or scarlet retained from their ancient ornamentation; even as he had walked slowly up the aisle, his downcast eyes had noticed the chiseled heraldry of stones beneath his feet. Everywhere about him was the historic impact of the Torrs. Their ashes were here—their banners and shields and tilting-helmets, their symbolical quarterings of the best arms of the West, their own proudest device of all. Their white bull on the green ground was familiar in England long before the broom-corn of the Angevins had been thought of. The clerkly pun on Tor and Taurus was as like as not older than the English language itself. All this made something mightier, more imposing and enduring, than any edifice to be reared by man alone. It was only in part human, this structure of the family. The everlasting hills were a part of it, the dark ranges of forests, the spirits and legends of the ancient Marches.

"*In the morning it is green, and groweth up; but in the evening it is cut down, dried up and withered,*" droned the young clergyman.

But if man seemed to count for but little in this tremendous, forceful aggregation of

tradition and custom, yet again he might be all in all. The tall old man under the purple pall, there—it was easy to think contemptuously of him. Christian recalled, in a kind of affrighted musing, that one view of his grandfather that he had had. The disgust with which he had heard the stupid, violent words from those aged lips revived within him—then changed to wonder. Was it not, after all, the principle of strength which most affected men's minds? There had been discernible in that grandfather of his a certain sort of strength—dull, unintelligent, sinister, half-barbarous, but still strength. Was it not that which had brought forth the two hundred horsemen? And if this one element of strength—yes, you might call it brute strength—were lacking, then would all the other fine qualities in the world avail to hold the impalpable, intangible combination together?

"'*He shall have put down all rule, and all authority, and power.*'" It was the old parson who was reading now. "'*For He must reign, till He hath put all enemies under His feet.*'"

Yes, even in this Protestant religion to which he had passively become committed, force was the real ideal! Christian's wandering mind fastened itself for a moment upon the ensuing words of the lesson, but got

nothing from their confusing reiterations. He lapsed into reverie again, then started abruptly with the sudden perception that everybody in the church behind him must be looking at him. In the pew immediately behind, there would be Captain Edward and his wife, and Augustine; in the one behind that Lady Cressage, Lord Chobham and his son; beyond them scores and scores of others seated in rows, and then a throng in the aisle and the doorway—all purporting to think of the dead, but fixing their eyes none the less on the living. And it was not alone in the church, but through the neighborhood, for miles round about: when men spoke of the old Duke who was gone, their minds would in truth be dwelling upon the new Duke who was come. A thrill ran through his veins as the words spelled themselves out before his inner vision. The new Duke! He seemed never to have comprehended what it meant before.

No; and till this moment no genuine realization had come to him of this added meaning — this towering superstructure which the message of Julius and Emanuel had reared. It was only now that he hit upon the proper mental focus with which to contemplate this amazing thing. Not only was he a territorial ruler, one of the great

nobles of Europe, but he was the master of wealth almost beyond counting as well!

Those nearest to him were rising now, and he, obeying imperative impulses within him, lifted himself proudly to his feet. While the air throbbed with deep-voiced organ notes, in the pause which here ensued, his gaze rested upon the pall before him. There was a sense of transfiguration in the spectacle. The purple mantle became imperial Tyrian to his eyes—and something which was almost tenderness, almost reverence, yearned within him toward that silent, incased figure hidden beneath it. The mystic, omnipotent tie of blood gripped his heart.

With a collected sidelong look he surveyed the profiles of Emanuel and Lord Julius to his left. Theirs were the lineaments of princes. As if he had eyes in the back of his head, he beheld Edward and Augustine, as fancy revealed them standing in the pew behind him. Tall, slim, athletic, fair—the figures his imagination made of them appealed to the new patriarchal spirit in his heart. Perhaps they were not wholly nice, these young men, but they also were princes, and they were of his race, and no one should persecute them, or despitefully use them.

The uncouth little bearers of the dead had come forward again, and taken up their

burden. In a small lady-chapel, extending from the transept at the left, the interment was to take place, and thither Christian now followed the pall, leading the menfolk of his family and the male guests of position who attached themselves to the group. Thus some score of black-clad figures clustered round the oblong opening in the old stone floor, and Christian, standing at its head, glanced impassively over the undefined throng of spectators gathered at the doorway.

"'*Man that is born of woman hath but a short time to live, and is full of misery,*'" proclaimed the younger priest, with a sudden outburst of high-pitched, nasal tones which pierced the unexpectant ear. "'*He cometh up, and is cut down, like a flower; he fleeth as it were a shadow, and never continueth in one stay.*'"

Christian, watching abstractedly the impersonal wedge of faces at the door, all at once caught his breath in a sharp spasm of bewildered amazement. The little book he had been holding fell from his hands, balanced on its edge for an instant and toppled over into the dark vault below. He seemed unconscious of the incident—but stared fixedly, with parted lips and astonished eyes, at the image of something he had seen outside of the chapel. The thing itself had

apparently vanished. He perceived vaguely that people were looking at him—and with a determined effort regained control of his face and bearing. The puzzling thought that it might have been an illusion—that perhaps he had seen nothing at all—brought mingled confusion and solace to his mind. He put his hand to the open book which Lord Julius at his side held toward him, and pretended to look at it.

The coffin, now bereft of its purple covering, had been lowered to its final place. One of the bearers, standing over the cavity, crumbled dry earth from his tanned and clumsy fingers, and it fell with a faint rattle upon some resonant, unseen surface.

The phrase, "'*Our dear brother, here departed*,'" stuck out with awkward obtrusiveness from among the words of the priest. "'*Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust*,'" the sing-song went on. Then they were repeating the Lord's Prayer together in a buzzing, fitful murmur. There were other prayers—and then Christian read in the faces of those about him that the ceremony was finished. Accepting the suggestion of Lord Julius's movement, he also bent over, and looked blankly down into the obscurity of the vault. But when he lifted his head again, it was to throw a more

searching and strenuous glance than ever over the knot of people outside the door. And yes!—he had not been deceived. He distinctly saw the face again, and with lightning swiftness verified its features. Beyond a shadow of doubt it was Frances Bailey whom he beheld, mysteriously present in this most unlikely of places.

He withdrew his eyes and did not look that way again. The question whether she knew that he had recognized her, occupied his mind to the exclusion of all else, as he returned at the head of his followers to the body of the church. It still possessed his thoughts when he had joined the family group of chief mourners, loosely collecting itself in the aisle before the front pews, in waiting for the summons to the carriages. To some one he ought to speak at once, and for the moment his eye rested speculatively upon Cora. He identified her confidently, not only by her husband's proximity, but by the fact that her mourning veil was much thicker and longer than any of the others. Some unshaped consideration, however, restrained him, and on a swift second thought he turned to Kathleen.

"I want you to look," he whispered to her, inclining his head—"on the other side of the church, just in a line between the second

pillar and the white-bearded figure in the window—there is a tall young woman, with the gray and black hat. Do you see her? In a kind of way she belongs to us—she is Cora's sister, but I'm afraid if Cora asked her, she would not come to the Castle."

"Yes—once you talked to me about her," Kathleen reminded him.

"Well, will you do this for me?" he continued, in an eager murmur. "Go to her, and make sure that she promises to come up with the rest. It would be unforgivable—if we let her go away."

He had an uneasy feeling that Mrs. Emanuel's veil did not prevent her shrewd glance from reading him through and through—but he did not seek to dissemble the breath of relief with which he heard her assent.

CHAPTER XXIV

"It was not a very easy task," Kathleen found opportunity to say to Christian, half an hour later, as the family were assembling in his library. They stood together by the window nearest the table, and watched the embarrassed deportment of Lord Lingfield under the conversational attentions of Cora, as they talked in low tones.

"But she is here in the Castle: that is the principal thing." He did not shrink now from the implication of his words.

"Yes, she finally consented to come," explained the other. "I told her that you insisted upon it—and then—then I used some persuasion of my own."

"I thank you, Kathleen," he said, simply.

"It seems that she is to write an account of the funeral for some London newspaper. She said frankly, however, that that of itself did not account for her coming. It will pay her expenses—so she said—but the paper would not have sent her specially. And there is no doubt about it—she was really annoyed at being discovered."

The solicitors from Shrewsbury, entering the room now, gave at once an official air to everything. The elder of them, with oppressive formality, drew a formidable parchment from a bag held by his junior, and bowed elaborately to Christian. Then, as if he had received some mandate to do so from His Grace, he untied the tape, and cleared his throat. Those who had been seated, rose to their feet.

The will came to them unaltered from 1859—and contained, wrapped in a surprising deal of pompous verbiage, a solitary kernel of essential fact. No legatee was mentioned save an impersonal being called the heir-at-law. The absolutism of dynastic rule contemplated no distribution or division of power. This slender, dark-eyed young man, standing with head inclined and a nervous hand upon the table, had not come into being until long after that will was made, and for other long years thereafter his very existence had been unknown to the family at large. Yet, as the lawyer's reading ended, there he stood before their gaze, the unquestioned autocrat.

"This may be the best time to say it." Christian straightened himself, and addressed his family for the first time, with a grave smile, and a voice which was behaving itself

better than he feared it would. "There are no minor bequests, owing to the circumstances under which the will was drawn, but I have taken it upon myself to supply such omissions, in this matter, as shall commend themselves to my consideration. Upon this subject we may speak among ourselves at our leisure, later on." With distinguished self-possession he looked at his watch. "I think luncheon is at two."

There followed here an unrehearsed, and seemingly unpremeditated, episode. Lord Julius advanced with impressive gravity across the little open space, and taking the hand which Christian impulsively extended to him, bent over it in a formal and courtly bow. When Emanuel, following his father, did the same, it was within the consciousness of all that they had become committed to a new ceremonial rite. Kathleen, coming behind her husband, gave her cheek to be kissed by the young chief of her adopted clan—and this action translated itself into a precedent as well.

Edward and Augustine, after the hesitation of an awkward instant, came forward together, and in their turn, with a flushed stiffness of deportment, made their salutation to the head of the house. To them, conjointly, Christian said something in a

whisper. He kissed Cora upon each cheek, with a faint smile in his eyes at her preference for the foreign method. His remoter cousins, the Earl of Chobham and Lord Lingfield, passed before him, and he vaguely noted the reservation expressed in their lifeless palms and frigid half-bow. They seemed to wish to differentiate themselves from the others—to express to him the Pickwickian character of their homage. They were not Torrs; they did not salaam to him as their over-lord. They had a rival dynasty of their own, and their appearance here involved nothing but the seemly courtesy of distant relationship. He perceived in a dim way that this was what their manner was saying to him—but it scarcely diverted his attention. His glance and his thoughts passed over their heads, to fasten upon the remaining figure.

Lady Cressage, unlike the other two women, had retained the bonnet and heavy veil of mourning. The latter she held drawn aside with a black-gloved hand as she approached. It flashed suddenly across Christian's brain that the year of her mourning for her own dead was not over—yet in her own house she wore gay laces and light colors. But it was unkind to remember this—and senseless, too. He strove to revivify,

instead, the great compassionate impulse which formerly she had stirred within him. A pallid shadow of it was all that he could conjure up—and in the chill of this shadow he touched her white temple with his lips, and she moved away. There lingered in his mind a curious, passive conflict of memories as to whether their eyes had met or not. Then this yielded place to the impression some detached organ of perception had formed for him, that in that somber setting of crape her face had looked too small for the rest of her figure.

Then, as the whole subject melted from his mind, he turned toward the two young men who, upon his whispered request, had remained in the library after the departure of the others. He looked at his watch, and beckoned them forward with a friendly wave of his hand.

"Pray come and sit down," he said, with affability upon the surface of his tone. "We have a quarter of an hour, and I felt that it could not be put to better use than in relieving your minds a little—or trying to do so. Let me begin by saying that I do not think I have met either of you before. In fact, now that I reflect, I am sure that we have not met before. I am glad to see you both."

The two brothers had drawn near, and settled uneasily into the very chairs which Lord Julius and Emanuel had occupied some hours before. Again Christian half seated himself upon the corner of the table, but this time he swung his leg lightly as he surveyed his guests. It flattered his prophetic judgment to note that Augustine seemed the first to apprehend the meaning of his words, but that Edward, upon pondering them, appeared the more impressed by their magnanimity. Between them, as they regarded him and each other doubtfully, the family likeness was more striking than ever. Christian remembered having heard somewhere that their father, Lord Edward, had been a dark man, as a Torr should be. Their flaxen hair and dull blue eyes must come from that unmentionable mother of theirs, who was living in indefinite obscurity —if she was living at all—upon the blackmail Julius paid her for not using the family name. The thought somehow put an added gentleness into his voice.

"How old are you—Eddy?" he asked, forcing himself into the use of the diminutive as a necessary part of the patriarchal rôle he had assumed.

"Nine-and-twenty in October," answered the Captain, poutingly. It seemed on the

tip of his tongue to add something else, but he did not.

"There's two years and a month between us," remarked Augustine, with more buoyancy.

"And you've been out of the army for five years," pursued Christian. "It seems that you became a Captain very early. Would there be any chance of your taking it up again, where you left off?"

Edward shook his head. "It couldn't be done twice. I got it by a lucky fluke—a friend of my father's, you know. But they're deuced stiff now," he answered. "You have to do exams and things. An old johnnie asks you what bounds Peru on the northeast, and if you can't remember just at the minute, why, you get chucked. Out you go, d'ye see?"

"What is your idea, then? What would you like to do?"

Captain Edward knitted his scanty, pale brows over this question, and regarded the prospect through the window in frowning perplexity. "Oh, almost anything," he remarked at last, vacuously.

Christian permitted himself the comment of a smiling sniff. "Think it over," he said, and directed his glance at the younger brother. "You're in Parliament," he ob-

served, with a slight difference in tone. "I'm not sure that I quite understand What is it that attracts you in a—in a Parliamentary career?"

Augustine lifted his pale, scanty brows in surprise. The right kind of answer did not come readily to him. "Well," he began with hesitation — "there was that seat in Cheshire where we still had a good bit of land—and Julius didn't object—and I had an idea it would help me in the City." He recovered confidence as he went on. "But it is pretty well played out now. I came in too late. The Kaffir boom spoiled the whole show. Five years ago an M P. could pick and choose; I knew fellows who were on twenty boards at a time, and big blocks of stock were flying about them like—like hailstones. But you can't do that now. M. P.'s are as cheap as dirt; they won't have 'em at any price. A fellow hardly makes his cab-fares in the City nowadays. And even if you get the very best inside tips, brokers have got so fearfully nasty about your margins being covered——"

"Oh, well," interposed Christian, "it isn't necessary that we should go into all that. I do not like to hear about the City. If you get money for yourself there, you have taken it away from somebody else. I would rather

that people of our name kept away from such things."

"If you come to that, everybody's money is taken from somebody else," said Edward, unexpectedly entering the conversation. His brother checked him with a monitory hand on his arm. "No, you don't understand," Augustine warned him. "I quite see what the Duke means."

"If you see what I mean," returned Christian, quietly, "perhaps you will follow the rest that I have to say. Do you care very much about remaining in Parliament?"

Augustine's face reflected an eager mental effort to get at his august interlocutor's meaning. "Well—that's so hard to say," he began, anxiously. "There are points about it, of course—but then—when you look at it in another way, why of course——"

"My idea is this," Christian interposed once more. "I hope you won't mind my saying it—but there seems to me something rather ridiculous about your being in the House. Parliament ought not to be treated as a joke, or a convenience. It is a place for men who will work hard in the service of the country, and who have the tastes and the information and the judgment and the patriotic devotion to make their work of value to their country. I dare say that there

are members who do not entirely measure up to this standard, but after all there *is* a standard, and I do not like to be a party to lowering it. England has claims upon us Torrs; it deserves something better at our hands than that. So I think I would like you to consider the idea of resigning your seat—or at least, dropping out at the end of this Parliament. Or no—that would be waiting too long. You would better think of retiring now."

"Do you mean that *I* am to stand for the seat, instead?" asked Edward, looking up with awakened interest.

Christian stared, then sighed smilingly and shook his head.

"No, that doesn't seem to have been in my mind," he replied with gentleness. He contemplated the elder brother afresh.

"Have you thought yet what you would like to do?" he asked again, almost with geniality.

"How d'ye mean 'do'?" inquired Edward, with a mutinous note in his voice. "Is it something about a business? If you ask me straight, I'm not so fearfully keen about 'doin' ' anything. No fellow wants to do things, if he can rub along without."

Christian found himself repressing a gay chuckle with effort. He had not dreamed

he should like this one of his kinsmen so much.

"No—no; you shall not do things," he promised him, with a sparkling eye. "That would be too bad."

Captain Edward turned in his chair, and recrossed his legs. "It's a trifle awkward, all this, you know," he declared, with an impatient scowl. "It doesn't suit me to be made game of. You've got the whip hand, and you can give me things or not, as you like, and I've got to be civil and take what you offer, because I can't help myself—but damn me if I like to be chaffed into the bargain! I wouldn't do it to you, d'ye see, if it was the other way about."

Christian's face lapsed into instant gravity. A fleeting speculation as to that problematical reversal of positions rose in his mind, but he put it away. "Ah, you mustn't think that," he urged, with serious tones. "No, Cousin Edward, this is what I want to say to you." And then, all unbidden, the things he really wished to say, yet which he had not thought of before, ranged themselves in his mind.

"Listen to me," he went on. "You have been a soldier. You were a soldier when you were a very young man. Now, you had an uncle who was also a soldier when he was

a mere youth—a very loyal and distinguished soldier, too. He died a soldier when he was in his fortieth year—far away from his family, from his wife and son, and much farther away still from the place and country of his birth. Once, in his youth, he was mixed up in an unpleasant and even disgraceful affair. How much to blame he personally was—that I do not know. It was very long ago—and he was so young a man—really I refuse to consider the question. I could insist to myself that he was innocent—if I felt that it mattered at all, one way or the other—and if I did not feel that by doing so, somehow he would not be then so real a figure to me as he is now. And he is very real to me; he has been so all my life."

He paused, with a momentary break in his voice, to blink the tears from his eyes. It was not ducal, but he put the back of his hand to his cheeks, and dried them.

"I show you how it affects me," he continued, simply. "No matter what he did in some stupid hour in London, he was a brave soldier before that, and after that. He fought for many losing causes; he died fighting for one which was most hopeless of all. I am proud that I am his son. I am proud for you, that you are his nephew. And something has occurred to me that I

think you will like to do—for me and for him. When I stood to-day over our vault—where we are all buried—it cut me to the heart to remember that one of us lies alone, a great way off—in a strange land by himself. I propose to you that you go to Spain for me—it is at Seo de Urgel, in the mountain country of the Catalans—and that you find his grave, and that you bring him back here to sleep with his people. He would not return in his lifetime—but I think he would be pleased with us for bringing him back now."

Edward had looked fixedly up at his cousin, then glanced away, then allowed his blank gaze to return, the while these words were being spoken. It was impossible to gather from his reddened, immobile face, now, any notion of their effect upon him. But after a moment's pause, he rose to his feet, squared his shoulders and put out his hand to Christian.

"Quite right; I'll go," he said, abruptly.

The two men shook hands, with a sense of magnetic communion which could have amazed no one more than themselves. Then, under a recurring consciousness of embarrassed constraint, they turned away from each other, and Edward wandered off awkwardly toward the door.

"Oh—a moment more," called Christian, with a step in his cousin's direction. Then on second thoughts he added: "Or shall we let that wait? I will see you again—some time to-day or to-morrow. Yes—leave me now for a minute with your brother."

When the door had closed upon Edward, Christian turned slowly to Augustine, and, as he leaned once more against the table, regarded him with a ruminating scrutiny.

"I am puzzled about you," he remarked, thoughtfully.

Augustine returned the gaze with visible perturbation.

"I think," pursued Christian, "that it rather annoys me that you don't tell me to puzzle and be damned."

The other took the words with a grimace, and an unhappy little laugh. He, too, rose to his feet. "I funked it," he said with rueful candor.

"Well, don't funk things with me," Christian advised him, with a testiness of which, upon the instant, he was ashamed. "Look here," he continued, less brusquely, "I could take it from your brother that he did not want to do things. That fits him: he is not the kind of man to apply himself in that way. But I have the feeling that you are different. There ought to be performance

—capacity—of some sort in you, if I could only get to know what it is. You are only my age. Isn't there something that particularly appeals to you?"

Augustine balanced himself meditatively upon his heels. "You say you bar the City" —he remarked with caution. "Would you have any objection to Johannesburg? It's not what it was, by any means, but it's bound to pick up again. I might do myself very well there—with a proper start."

"But you are thinking always of money!" broke in Christian, sharply once again. "Suppose that there was no question of money—suppose, what shall I say? that you had twelve hundred a year, secure to you without any effort of your own—what would you do then?"

This seemed very simple to Augustine. "I would do whatever you wanted me to do," he replied, with fervor.

Christian shrugged his shoulders, and dismissed him with a gesture. "We will speak again about it," he said coldly, and turned away.

Descending the great staircase a few minutes later, Christian entered the door which Barlow had been waiting to open for him—and made his first public appearance as the dispenser of Caermere's hospitality.

The guests, after the old mid-day fashion of the place, were already for the most part gathered in the large dining-hall, and stood or sat in groups upon the side pierced by the tall windows. These guests did not dissemble the interest with which they from time to time directed glances across to the other side, where a long table, laid for luncheon, put in evidence a grateful profusion of cold joints and made-dishes.

A pleased rustle of expectancy greeted Christian's advent, but it seemed that this did not, for the moment at least, involve food and drink. He strolled over to the company, and, as he exchanged words here and there, kept an attentive eye busy in taking stock of its composition. There were some forty persons present, of whom three-fourths, apparently, were county people. A few casual presentations forced themselves upon him, but the names of the new acquaintances established no foothold in his memory. He smiled and murmured words which he hoped were seasonable—but all the while he was scanning the assemblage with a purpose of his own.

At last he came to Kathleen, and was able to have a private word in her ear. "I do not see her anywhere," he whispered.

"I could not prevail upon her to come in

to lunch," she answered; "I imagine it is partly a question of clothes. But she is being looked out for. And afterward I will take charge of her again, if you like—though——"

The sentence remained unfinished, as she took the arm Christian offered her, at Barlow's eloquent approach.

CHAPTER XXV

During the progress of the luncheon, Christian found no opportunity for intimate conversation with Emanuel's wife. The elderly and ponderously verbose Lord Chobham sat upon her right; there was the thin-faced, exigeant wife of some clerical person in gaiters—a rural dean, was it not?—full of dogmatic commonplaces, on his left. The other people did not seem to talk so much. The scene down the table—with so much black cloth offset garishly against the white linen in the daylight—presented an effect of funereal sobriety, curiously combined with a spontaneous reaction of the natural man against this effect. The guests ate steadily, and with energy; Christian noted with interest how freely they also drank. For himself, he could not achieve an appetite, but thirst was in the air. He lifted his glass bravely to Lord Julius, whose massive bulk and beard confronted him at the other end of the table—and then to others whose glance from time to time caught his.

Once he found the chance to murmur to

Kathleen: "When this is over, I hope you will manage it so that I may speak with you."

She nodded slow assent, without looking at him. He, observing her profile, realized all at once that something was amiss with her. It came back to him now that a certain intensity of sadness had dwelt in the first glance they had exchanged that morning, upon meeting. At the time he had referred it to the general aspect of woe which people put on at funerals. He saw now that it was a grief personal to herself. And now that he thought of it, too, there had been much the same stricken look upon Emanuel's face. It was incredible that they should be thus devoured by grief at the fact of his grandfather's death. No one had liked that old man overmuch—but surely they least of all. The emotion of Lord Julius was more intelligible—and yet even this had a quality of broken dejection in it which seemed independent of Caermere's cause for mourning

The disquieting conviction that these dearly beloved cousins of his—these ineffably tender and generous friends of his—were writhing under some trouble unknown to him, took more definite shape in his mind with each new glance that he stole at her.

Once the thought sprang up that they might be unhappy because such a huge sum of money had been given to him, but on the instant he hated himself for being capable of formulating such a monstrous idea. The wondering solicitude which all this raised within him possessed his thoughts for the rest of the meal. He was consumed with impatience to get away so that he might question Kathleen about it.

Yet when at last he found himself beside her, standing before an old portrait in one of the chain of big rooms through which the liberated company had dispersed itself, this was just the question for which it seemed that no occasion would offer.

She began speaking to him at once. "The young lady--Miss Bailey, I should say—has gone for a walk—so Falkner learns from some of the women. They have the impression that she is coming back—but I don't know that I feel quite so sure about it."

Christian's face visibly lengthened. "It's very awkward," he said, with vague annoyance. "They do not arrange things in a very talented fashion, these people of mine."

"But what could they arrange?" she argued. An indefinable listlessness in her tone struck him. "It is a free country, you know, and this is the nineteenth century.

They cannot bodily capture a young woman and keep her in the Castle against her will. As I told you, I had difficulty in persuading her to come at all."

"Ah, what did you say to her?" he asked, eagerly.

"I can hardly tell you. She is not an ordinary person—and I know only that I tried not to say ordinary things to her. But what it was that I did say——" She broke off with an uncertain gesture, and a sigh.

"Ah, you saw that she was not ordinary!" said Christian, admiringly. "I should love dearly to hear what you really think of her —the impression that she makes upon you." Kathleen roused herself and turned to him. "Do you truly mean it, Christian?" she asked him, gravely.

"Do you blame me?" he rejoined, with uneasy indirection.

She pressed her lips together, and stared up at the picture with a troubled face. "I know so little of her," she protested. "You put too big a responsibility upon me. It is more than I am equal to."

With a sudden gust of self-reproach, he perceived afresh the marks of suffering in her countenance, and recalled his anxiety. "Take my arm," he said, softly, "and let us go on into the next room. There is a

terrace there, I think. Forgive me for troubling you," he added, as they moved forward. "I ought to have seen that you are not well—that you have something on your mind."

She did not answer him immediately. "It is Emanuel who is not well." she said, after a pause.

Christian uttered a formless little exclamation of grieved astonishment. "Oh, it is nothing serious?" he whispered imploringly.

She shook her head in a doubtful way. "No, I think not—that is, not irrevocably. But he has worked too hard. He has broken down under the strain. We are going away for a long journey—to rest, and forget about the System."

He bent his head to look into her eyes—trusting his glance to say the things which his lips shrank from uttering. A window stood open, and they passed out upon a broad stone terrace, shaded and pleasant under a fresh breeze full of forest odors.

"Oh—the System"—he ventured to say, as they stood alone here, and she lifted her head to breathe in the revivifying air—"I felt always that it was too much for one man. The load was too great. It would crush the most powerful man on earth."

She nodded reflective assent. "Oh, yes —I'm afraid I hated it," she confessed to him, in a murmur full of contrition.

"But he is going away now," urged Christian, hopefully. "You will have him to yourself—free from care, seeing strange and beautiful new places—as long as you like. Ah, then soon enough that gaiety of yours will return to you. Why, it is such a shock to me to think of you as sad, depressed—you who are by nature so full of joy and high spirits. Ah, but be sure they will all return to you! I make no doubt whatever of that. And Emanuel, too—he will get rested and strong, and be happy as he never was before —the dear fellow!"

She smiled at him in wan, affectionate fashion. "All the courage has gone out of me," she said. "Will it be coming back again? God knows!"

"But surely——" Christian began, with hearty confidence.

She interrupted him. "What I am fearful of—it is not so much his health, strictly speaking—but the terrible unsettling blow that all this means to him. It is like the death of a beautiful only child to the fondest of fathers. It tears his heart to pieces. He loved his work so devotedly—it was so wholly a part of his life—and to have to give it up!

He says he is reconciled. Poor man, he tried with all his strength to make himself believe that he is. I catch him forcing a smile on his face when he sees me looking at him—and that is the hardest of all for me to bear. But I don't know"—she drew a long breath, and gazed with a wistful brightening in her eyes at the placid hills and sky—"it may work itself out for the best. As you say—when we get away alone together, ah, that is where love like ours will surely tell. I do wrong to harbor any doubts at all. When two people love each other as we do—ah, Christian, boy, there's nothing else in all the world to equal that!"

He inclined his head gravely, to mark his reverential sympathy with her mood.

"Ah, but you know nothing of it at all," she went on. "You're just a lad—and love is no more to be understood by instinct than any other great wisdom. Millions of people pass through life talking about love—and they would stare with surprise if you told them they never had had so much as a glimmer of the meaning of it. They use the name of love in all the matings of young couples—and there's hardly once in a thousand times that it isn't blasphemy to mention it. Do you know what most marriages are? Life-sentences! If you have means and

intelligence, you make your prison tolerable; you can get used to it, and even grow dependent upon it—but it is a prison still. The best-behaved convict eyes his warder with a cruel thought somewhere at the back of his mind. Do you remember—when you left us the first time, I begged you to be in no haste to marry?"

He bowed again. "Oh, yes, I remember it all," he said, soberly.

"I have come to feel so strongly upon that subject," she explained. "It seems to me more important than all others combined. It is the last thing in the world that should be decided upon an impulse, or a passing fancy—yet that is just what happens all about us. The books are greatly to blame for that. They talk as if only boys and girls knew what love meant. They flatter the young people, and turn their empty heads, with the notion that their idlest inclinations are very probably sacred emotions—which they may trust to burn brightly in a pure flame all their lives. The innocent simpletons rush to light this penny dip that is warranted to blaze eternally, and in a week or a month they are in utter darkness. We trembled lest you, coming so suddenly into a new life, should meet with that misfortune."

He smiled faintly at her. "You see, I have not," he commented.

She regarded him thoughtfully. "It is impossible to make rules for others in these matters," she observed, "but there is this thing to be said. True love must be built upon absolutely true friendship; there can be no other foundation for it. You will often see two men who are fond of each other. They delight in being together. Very often you cannot imagine what is the tie between them—and they would not be able to tell you. They just like to be together—even though they may not speak for hours, and may be as different in temperament as chalk and cheese. That is the essence of friendship—and you cannot have love without it. The man and the woman must have the all-powerful sense of ideal companionship between them. They must be able to say with truth to themselves that the world will always be richer to them together than apart. There may be many other elements in love, but there can be no love at all without this element. But you wonder why I am saying all this to you."

He made a deprecatory gesture of the hands. "I am always charmed when you talk to me. I have been remembering that

dear home of yours, and how inexpressibly good you were to me. I prize that memory so fondly!"

She smiled with an approach to her old gaiety of manner. "You were like a son of our own to us. And so we think of you now—as if you were ours."

"And with what munificence you have treated me!" he exclaimed, fervently.

"And why not? For whom else would we be laying up our money? Oh, there was no difference of opinion about that. Months ago it was decided that when you came into Caermere you should come into everything."

"I feared that Emanuel would be angry—disappointed—at my not taking up his work—but truly I could not. It wouldn't be easy to explain to you—but——"

"No—let us not go into reasons. He had no feeling about it whatever. How should he? It would have been as reasonable to be vexed because the lenses of his spectacles did not fit your eyes. And Emanuel is reasonableness itself. No—the experiment was quite personal to himself. Without him, it could not have gone on at all. It will not go on now, when he leaves it to others. We make some little pretense that it will—but we know in our hearts that it won't. And there was a fatal fault in it. to

begin with, that would have killed it sooner or later, in any case."

"I know what you mean," he interposed, with sensitive intuition. "There was no proper place in it for women. 'The very corner-stone of the System was the perpetual enslavement of women'—or rather, I should say"—he stumbled awkwardly as the sweeping form of the quotation revealed itself to him—"I should say, it did not provide women with the opportunities which—which——"

Kathleen also had her intuitions. "May I ask?—it sounds as if you were repeating a remark—was it Miss Bailey who said that about the corner-stone?"

Christian bit his lip and flushed confusedly. "Yes—I think those were her words," he confessed. "But you must remember," he added, eager to minimize the offense—"it was in the course of a long discussion on the whole subject, and she——"

"The dear girl!" said Kathleen, with a sigh of relief.

"Ah, but you would love her!" he cried, excitedly perceiving the significance of her words. "She has the noblest mind—calm and broad and serene—and so fine a nature—I know you would love her!"

Kathleen put a hand on his arm, with

motherly directness. "But do *you* love her?" she asked.

To his own considerable surprise he hesitated. "I have that feeling of deep friendship that you described," he said, slowly. "The charm of being where she is is like nothing else to me. I cannot think that it would ever lose its force for me. I get the effect of drawing strength and breadth of thought and temper from her, when I am with her. I would rather spend my life with her for my companion than any other woman I have ever seen. That is what you mean, is it not?"

"Partly," she made enigmatic response. "But—now you mustn't answer me if I ask what I've no business to ask—but the suspicion came to me while you were speaking—I am right, am I not, in thinking that you have said all this to her?"

"Yes," he admitted with palpable reluctance, "and she would not listen to me. Only a few hours before I heard the news of my grandfather's death, I asked her to be my wife, and she refused. She seemed very resolute. And yet she has some of that same feeling of friendship for me. She said that she had always a deep interest in me. She had read books—very serious books—in order to be able to advise me, if the chance

ever came. All that bespeaks friendship, surely! And her coming here, to look on and still not be seen—you said yourself that she was distressed at being discovered—is not that the act of warm friendship?"

Kathleen pondered her reply. She looked away at the nearest hills across the river for some moments, with her gaze riveted fixedly as if in an absorption of interest. Without moving her head, she spoke at last: "You have a good deal to say about friendship. It is my fault—I introduced the word and insisted on it—but did you also lay such stress upon this 'friendship' to her?"

"You do not know her nature," he assured her. "There is nothing weak or commonplace in it. One does not talk to her as to an ordinary woman—as you yourself said. I begged her to join her life to mine, and I put the plea on the highest possible grounds. All that I have repeated to you, and much more, I said to her—how great was my need of her, how lofty her character seemed to me, how all my life I should revere her, and gain strength and inspiration from being with her."

"H—m," said Kathleen.

"Do you mean—?" he began, regarding his companion wonderingly—"was that not enough? Remember the kind of woman

she is—proud of her independence, occupied with large thoughts, not to be appealed to by any but the highest motives—a creature who disdains the sentimental romances of inferior women—do you mean that there should have been something more? I do love her—and should I have told her so in so many words?"

"I'm afraid that's our foible," she made answer. On the face that she turned to him, something like the old merry light was shining. "You goose!" she scolded at him, genially.

His eyes sparkled up as with a light from her own. "Oh, I will make some excuse, and get away from these people, and find her," he cried. "She will be returning, if not here, then to the inn, down below the church, don't you think? There would be nothing out of the way in my riding down, would there? Or if I sent a man down with a letter, appealing to her not to go away—telling her why? There is no earthly reason why she should not stop here at the Castle. Her sister is here—why, of course, she belongs quite to the family party. How dull of me not to have thought of that! Of course, Cora can go and fetch her."

"I think I would leave Cora out of it," Kathleen advised him. "There is nothing

that you cannot do better yourself. Come here! Do you see that patch of reddish stain on the hill there, above the poplars where the iron has colored the rock? Well, look to the right, on the ledge just a bit higher up—there is Miss Bailey. I have been watching her for some minutes. She has been round the hill; the path she is on will lead her to the Mere Copse—and to the heath beyond the orchards."

His eyes had found the moving figure, microscopic yet unmistakable in the sunshine against the verdant face of the hill—and they dwelt upon it for a meditative moment.

Then he turned to Kathleen, and took her hand, and almost wrung it in his own. "Do let us go in!" he urged her, with exultant eagerness.

CHAPTER XXVI

Christian, professing to himself momentarily that the chance to get away from his guests was at hand, discovered that his escape, all the same, was no easy matter.

Kathleen had disappeared somewhere, and without her he seemed curiously helpless. He did not as yet know the house well enough to be sure about its exits. The result of one furtive attempt at flight was to find himself in the midst of a group of county people, who fell back courteously at his approach and, as if by design, let him become involved in a quite meaningless conversation with a purple-faced, bull-necked old gentleman whose name he could not remember. This person talked at tremendous length, producing his words in gurgling spasms; his voice was so husky and his manner so disconcerting—not to mention the peculiarities of the local dialect in which he spoke—that Christian could make literally nothing of his remarks. He maintained a vapid listener's-smile, the while his eyes roamed despondently about the room, and

what he could see of the next apartment, in search of some relief. If he could hit upon Dicky Westland—or even Edward or Augustine!

It became apparent to him, at last, that his interlocutor was discoursing on the subject of dogs. Of course—it would be about the Caermere hounds. On the grave faces of those about him, who stood near enough to hear the sounds of this mysterious monologue, he read signs that they considered themselves a party to it. It was on their behalf as well as his own that the old gentleman was haranguing him—and he swiftly perceived the necessity of paying better attention.

"The hounds—yes," he said, after a little. "I have been making inquiries about them. I am advised that they cannot be kept up properly for less than four thousand five hundred a year."

"Up to Lord Porlock's death, we had something like twenty-four hundred pounds from the Castle, and we made a whip-round among ourselves," the other replied, "for the rest. With corn what it is, and rents what they are, we're all so poor now that it'll be harder than ever to get subscriptions, but we'll try to do our share if the Castle'll meet us half-way."

Christian felt that he liked being referred to as "the Castle." Moreover, an idea suddenly took shape in his mind. "My uncle, Lord Porlock, was the Master," he said. "And before him my grandfather, I believe. But what has been done since Lord Porlock's death—about a new Master, I mean?"

Out of the complicated response made to this question he gathered vaguely that nothing had been done—that nothing could have been done.

"My cousin, Captain Torr, is a hunting man, I think." He threw out the question with some diffidence, and was vastly relieved to see the faces brighten about him.

"None better, by God!" affirmed the old gentleman, with vehemence, and there followed a glowing and spluttering eulogium of Edward's sportsmanlike qualities and achievements, in the middle of which Christian recalled that the speaker was Sir George Dence.

"I like the Mastership to continue in the family, Sir George," he replied, suavely proud of the decision he had leaped to. "I think I shall suggest to you that Captain Edward take the hounds, and that, for a time at least, you allow the Castle to be at the entire expense. At all events, you have

my annual subscription of five thousand pounds to begin upon."

He made a dignified half-bow in the silence which ensued, and boldly moved away. The murmur of amazed admiration which rose behind him was music in his ears.

Visions of possible escape rose for the moment before him. He walked with an air of resolution through the next room, trying to remember whither the corridor outside led—but at the doorway he stopped face to face with Lord Lingfield.

"Ah," said his cousin, amiably, "I did not know if I should see you again. I thought perhaps that you had gone to lie down. Funerals take it out of one so, don't they? My father is quite seedy since lunch, and poor Lady Cressage has the most wretched headache! I think myself she'd do better not to travel while it lasts, but she's anxious to get away, and so we're all off by the evening train."

"Oh, I didn't dream of your hurrying off like this," exclaimed Christian, sincerely enough. "But if you are set upon it—come, let's find your father. It will seem as if I had neglected him."

"He's in his room," explained Lord Lingfield, as they moved away together, "getting into some heavier clothes. The evenings

are chilly here in the hills, and we're to start almost immediately, and take the long drive round through the forest. Lady Cressage has talked so much of it, and we've never seen it, you know."

"But this is all too bad!" urged Christian. "You rush away before I have had time to have a word with any of you. There is no urgent reason for such haste, is there now, really?"

"Lady Cressage seems anxious to go," answered the other, with a kind of significance in his solemn voice. "And of course—since she came with us——"

Christian stole a quick glance at his kinsman, and as swiftly looked away. "If she prefers it—of course," he commented with brevity.

"Do you think she is very strong?" asked Lord Lingfield. "I have a kind of fear, sometimes, that her health is not altogether robust. She seemed very pale to-day." There was a note of obvious solicitude in his voice.

"She has a headache," Christian reminded him.

"Yes, that would account for it, wouldn't it?" The young man was visibly relieved by this reflection. "They may say what they like," he went on, "she is the most

beautiful woman in London to-day, just as she was when she was married. Let me see —I am not sure that I ever knew her precise age. Do you happen to know?"

"She *is* four-and-twenty."

"Not more! I should have said six, or at least five. Hm-m! Four-and-twenty!" The reiteration, for some reason, seemed to afford him pleasure. "I am nearly thirty myself," he added meditatively, "and I'm practically sure of being in the next Government. Shall you go in much for politics, do you think? It wouldn't be of any great use to you, except the Garter, perhaps, and it's so fearfully slow waiting for that. My father had the promise of it as long ago as Lord John Russell's time, and it hasn't come off yet. But then that Home Rule business was so unfortunate—it sent us all over to the Tory side, where there were already more people waiting for things than there were things to go round. If I were you, I would keep very quiet for a year or two—not committing myself openly to either side. I can't help thinking there will be a break-up. It's a fearful bore to have only twenty or thirty people on one side and five hundred on the other. They won't stand it much longer. It doesn't make a fair distribution of things. Of course, I'm a

Unionist, but if I were in your shoes, I'd think it over very carefully. The Liberals haven't got a single Duke—and mind you, though people don't seem to notice it, it is a fact that a party practically never succeeds itself. The Liberals are bound to come in, sooner or later—and then, if you were their only Duke, why, you'd get your Garter shot at you out of a gun—so to speak. Of course, I mustn't be mentioned as saying this—but you think it over! And it needn't matter in the least—our being in different parties. We can help each other quite as well—indeed, sometimes I'm tempted to think even better. Of course, I dare say there won't be much that I can do for you—for the next two or three years, at least—except in the way of advice, and tips, and that sort of thing—but there may be a number of matters that you can help me in."

Christian nodded wearily—with a nervous thought upon the time being wasted. "I am not likely to forget your kindness—or our family ties," he said, consciously evasive.

"You never saw Cressage, of course; awful beast!" remarked the other, with an irrelevancy which still struck the listener as having a certain method in it. "It makes a man furious to think what she must have suffered with him. And a mere child, too,

when she was married. Only four-and-twenty now! These early marriages are a great mistake. Of course, when a man gets to be nearly thirty, and there is a family and property and so on to be handed along, why, then marriage becomes a duty. That has always been my view. And I try invariably to do my duty, as I see it. I think a man ought to, you know."

Christian sighed, and restrained an impulse to look at his watch. They had sauntered forward into the central hallway; through the open door could be seen a carriage and pair drawn up before the steps. A rustle on the stairs behind him caught his ear, and turning, Christian beheld Lady Cressage descending toward him, with Lord Chobham looming, stately and severe, in the shadows above her.

Christian moved impulsively to her. "It was the greatest surprise to me—and disappointment, too—to hear that you were going like this," he declared, with outstretched hand.

She smiled feebly, and regarded him with a pensive consideration. Her heavy mourning of an earlier hour had been exchanged for a black garb less ostentatiously funereal, yet including the conventional widow's-fall, which he had not seen her wear before. The thought that here at Caermere, last

autumn, she had not even worn a widow's-cap, rose in his mind. It carried with it a sense of remissness, of contumacy as against the great family which had endowed her with one of its names. But at least now she exhibited a consciousness that her husband was less than a year dead. And her pallid face was very beautiful in its frame of black —a delicately strong face, meditative, reserved, holding sadness in a proud restraint. "I am not very well," she said to him, in tones to reach his ear alone. "The crowd here depressed me. I could not bring myself to appear at luncheon. It seems better that I should go away."

"But it is such a fatiguing journey—for one who does not feel wholly up to it!" he urged upon her. "All these strangers will be going—I think some of them have gone already. I don't know what their rule is here about stopping after luncheon—but surely they must clear out very soon. Then we shall be quite by ourselves—so that if that is your only reason for going—why, I can't admit that it is a reason at all."

He paused, and strove to cover with a halting smile his sudden perception that they were not talking with candor to each other. There were things in her mind, things in his mind, which bore no relation

to the words they uttered. She was looking at him musingly—and he felt that he could read in her glance, or perhaps gather from what there was not in her glance, that she would not go if he begged her with sufficient earnestness to remain. Nay, the conviction flashed vividly uppermost in his thoughts that even a tolerable simulation of this earnestness would be enough. It was as if a game were being played, in which he was not quite the master of his moves. In this mere instant of time, while they had stood facing each other, he had been able to reproduce the whole panorama of his contact with this beautiful woman. From that first memorable day when she had come into his wondering, distraught vision of the new life before him, to that other day but a week ago when he had stood trembling with passionate emotions in her presence, his mental pictures of her rose connectedly about him. They exerted a pressure upon his will. They left him no free agency in the matter. By all the chivalric, tenderly compassionate memories they evoked, he must bid her to remain.

"I am very sorry that you feel you must go," was what he heard himself say instead.

"Good-bye," she answered simply, and gave him her gloved hand with an impassive face. "Lord Chatham and Lord Ling-

field are good enough to see me back to London again. We are driving round through the forest. Our people are to join us at the station with the luggage. Good-bye."

He accompanied the party out to the carriage door, despite some formal doubts about its being the proper thing to do. Both father and son made remarks to him, to which he seemed to himself to be making suitable answers, but what they were about he never knew. The tragedy of Edith's final departure from Caermere—she who had been the hostess here when he came; she who was to have worn the coronet on her lovely brow as the mistress of it all—seized upon his mind and harrowed it. A vehement self-reproach that his thoughts should have done her even momentary injustice stung him, as he beheld her seated in the carriage. She smiled at him—that wistful, subdued smile of the headache—and then, as the horses moved, his eyes were resting upon another smile instead—the beaming of fatuous content upon the countenance of Lord Lingfield, who sat facing her.

Christian, regarding this second cousin of his as the carriage receded from view, suddenly breathed a long sigh of relief.

All at once remembering many things, he

wheeled with the impulse to run up the steps. Upon reflection, he ascended them sedately instead, and gave orders in the hall that Mr. Westland should be sent to him forthwith. Two or more groups of departing guests came upon him, while he stood irresolutely here, and he bade them farewell with formal gravity. The two parsons whom he had seen at the church were among them—attired now in black garments with curiously ugly little round, flat hats—and he noted with interest that their smirking deference now displeased him less than it had done in the morning. He perceived that his lungs were becoming accustomed to the atmosphere of adulation, and smiled tolerantly at himself. How long would it be, he wondered with idle amusement, before it would stifle him to breathe any other air?

Augustine had sauntered out from some unknown quarter into the hall, and Christian beckoned to him. A shapeless kind of suspicion, born of a resemblance now for the first time suggesting itself, had risen in his brain. He took the young man by the arm, and strolled aside with him.

"Am I wrong," he asked carelessly, "or did I see you at the supper at the Hanover Theater? Let us see—it would be a week

ago to-night? I thought so. Why I asked —I was curious to know whom you were with. It was a young man; you were standing together between some scenery as I passed you."

"Oh!" said Augustine, with visible reassurance. "That was Tom Bailey—Cora's brother, you know."

"What sort is he?" Christian pursued, secretly astonished at the inspired accuracy of his intuition.

"Well"—replied the other, hesitatingly—"it's rather hard to say. He got sent down from Cambridge for something or other, and his governor got the needle over it, and put him on an allowance of a pound a week, or something like that, and so what could he do? It's jolly hard on a young fellow round town to have less money than anybody else. He's bound to get talked about, if he only owes half-a-crown to some outsider or other, and that makes other fellows turn shirty. But I think he always pays when he can."

"You like him, then, do you?"

"Oh, yes—I like Tom well enough," answered Augustine, dubiously pondering the significance of the interrogatory. "He'd be all right if—if he had a proper chance." With a sigh, he ventured to add: "He's like the rest of us—that way."

At sight of Dicky Westland's approach, Christian dropped his inquiries abruptly. "All right," he said, with enigmatic brevity, and turned to his secretary with a meaning gesture. "I want to get away from here—out of the Castle," he murmured to the newcomer, "without a minute's delay. I have a—kind of appointment, and I am already late. If you will get our hats, we will walk out together, as if we were discussing some private matter, and then no one will interrupt us."

This confidence was only partially justified by events. The two made their way unmolested into the open air, and across some long stretches of lawn to the beginning of the series of gardens. It was within Christian's memory that one reached the orchards and the opening upon the heath by traversing these gardens. But in the second of them, where remarkable masses of tulips in gorgeous effulgence of bloom occupied the very beds in which he believed the dahlias must have been last year, there was some one on the well-remembered path in front of him.

A little child of two or three years, still walking insecurely at least, was being led along the edge of the flower-border by a woman in black whose back was turned.

The infant had caught the notion of bending over the hyacinths, one by one, laboriously to smell their perfume, and the woman indulgently lent herself to the pastime, halting and supporting the little one by the hand.

Christian wondered vaguely what child this could be, before observation told him that the person they were approaching was a lady. He took Dicky's arm then, and quickened their step. "We will be very much engaged as we pass," he admonished him. After a few paces, however, the futility of this device made itself apparent. The lady, glancing indifferently over her shoulder at the sound of their tread, turned on the instant with a little cry of pleasure.

It was Cora who came toward them, now radiant of face and with an extended hand. She dragged the surprised child heedlessly along at her side with the other arm.

"Oh, Duke!" she cried. "I did so long to burst in upon you, wherever you were to be found, and thank you when I heard. It was Sir George Dence who told us. And Eddy, he's quite off his head with joy! He wanted to look you up, too, but I told him to put off thanking you till to-morrow; between ourselves, I don't fancy he'll be seen quite to the best advantage later on to-day. But I know you'll think none the worse of

him for that; and there's a good bit to be done, he says, in the way of pulling the Hunt together again to work like one man. He's begun already promoting the right sort of feeling. He's got Sir George and old General Fawcett and about a dozen more of 'em in the billiard-room, and I told him everything would be all right so long as they didn't sing. On account of the funeral, you know. And—why, you've never seen my oldest unmarried daughter! Look up and say, 'How-de-do?' Chrissy. Why, she's your namesake! Yes, her baptismal name is Christiana or Christina—which is it? We always call her Chrissy. And you haven't told me what an effective family group I make. You never would have believed that I could be so domestic, now, would you?"

She had gathered the child up into her arms, and under the influence of her jocund mood Christian smiled cheerfully. "You are very wonderful as a mother," he assured her, and extended a tentative finger toward Chrissy, who, huddled in awkward and twisted discomfort under her mother's elbow, regarded him with unconcealed repulsion.

"She seems an extremely healthy child," he remarked, and the words were not so perfunctory as they sounded. The robust, red-

cheeked heartiness of Chrissy raised musing reflections in his mind. If this infant, with its stout mottled arms and legs, had been a boy, it would be at this moment his heir. No one could ask for a finer child—and she was very closely akin to him. And Cora was her mother—and Cora's sister!

"Oh, but where *are* we going to live?" she broke in upon his meditations. "I said to Eddy that I'd lay odds you were thinking of David's Court for us. You know the kennels used to be there before Porlock's time."

"All that we can arrange," said Christian, shaking off his reverie, and lifting his hat. "Rest easy in your mind about everything."

She nodded with an expansive geniality which freely included Dicky as well, and then walked away. It slowly occurred to Christian that she had said nothing about her sister's presence in the neighborhood, although it was impossible to suppose her ignorant of it. Upon consideration, he decided that her reticence was delicate. He felt that he liked Cora, and then uneasily speculated upon the seeming probability that his liking for her was in excess of her sister's.

"Westland," he said, with a new thought in his busy brain, "you know about geography—about where the different British

colonies are on the map, and what they are distinguished for. I want to know of a good place, a very long way off, where two young men with a moderate capital might do well, or at least have the chance to do well."

"Fellows like that generally go to South Africa, nowadays," replied Dicky, "though I believe it's gone off a bit. It's not as far away as Australia, but it's livelier, apparently. They don't seem to come back as much."

"No; I have a prejudice against that Johannesburg. It is not a good atmosphere, and it is too easy to get into trouble there."

"There are great reports about British Columbia just now. They've found wonderful new gold-fields, and they're a fearful distance from anywhere. It takes you months to get to them, so I'm told. But it depends so much on what the fellows themselves are like. If I may ask, do I know them?"

"It is Augustine Torr that I have in mind, and a young friend of his—Bailey his name is. By the way, a brother of the lady we just left."

"I know *of* him," commented Dicky sententiously.

"Well, it has occurred to me that these young men, for whom there seems no

specially suitable foothold in England, might accomplish something in the colonies. That is the way Greater Britain, as they call it, has been made—by young men who might have done nothing at all worth doing at home. Life is really very difficult and complicated in this crowded island, unless one has exactly the temperament to succeed. But in the colonies it is different. Men who are of no use here may become valuable there. I have heard that there are many instances of this. And these young men, it seems to me that very possibly, if they found themselves on new ground, they might do as others have done and get on. We do not quite know what to do with them here, but we send them out, and they make the Empire."

"It's rather rough on the Empire, though, isn't it?" said Dicky.

Christian frowned and drew himself up a little. "One is my cousin," he said coldly, "and the other is the brother of—is the brother of my cousin's wife."

There was a moment of silence, and then the secretary, as upon a sudden resolution, stopped. "It's no good my going on," he said, nervously, but with decision. "I daresay you don't mean it, but all the same it's too much for me. If you don't mind, I

think I'll turn it up and catch the evening train. I don't mind going to the station in the brake with the servants and the luggage. It certainly won't take anybody by surprise."

Christian regarded him with open-eyed astonishment. "I don't know what you're talking about," he said, in obvious candor.

Dicky restlessly threw out his hands. "Oh, I can't stand this Dukeness of yours," he declared. "You put it on too thick. I know Gus Torr, and I know as much as I want to of Tom Bailey, and I know they're no good, and you know it, too—although I don't say they mayn't get on in the colonies. God knows what won't get on there! But when I make some perfectly civil and natural remark on the subject, you flame up at me, and blow yourself out like a pouter pigeon, and say they're—haw-haw!—relations of yours. Well, that be damned, you know! It may do once in a way with outsiders, but it isn't good enough to live with."

"Dicky!" said Christian, in a voice of awed appeal. His brown face distorted itself in lines of painful bewilderment as he gazed at his companion. "Have I done that? Is it as bad as that?" He gasped the questions out in a frightened way and tears sprang into his eyes. "Then it is not you who should catch the evening train, but

me. I am not fit to be here!" He finished with a groan of bitter dejection and bowed his head.

Westland, as much scared as surprised at the violent result of his protest, moved impetuously to his friend and put a hand on his shoulder. "No-no! No-no," he said, in a soothing voice. "It's all right! I said you didn't mean it, you know. Truly, old man, I *knew* you didn't mean it! Upon my word, it's all right!"

Christian lifted his head, and tried to choke down his agitation. "But you go away from me!" he said in despairing tones. "It is the same as ever! Nothing is changed for me! I do not make friends—much less keep them!"

"But I *am* your friend! You *are* keeping me!" Dicky insisted, raising his voice. An odd impulse to laugh aloud struggled confusedly with the concern the other's visible suffering gave him. "I take it all back. I'm stopping with you, right enough!"

Christian accepted the assurance in a dazed way, and after he had silently shaken the other's hand, began walking on again, studying the ground with a troubled frown. "I am a weak and dull fool!" he growled at last, in rage at himself. "I have not sense enough to behave properly! It is a mistake

that I should be put over anybody else! I make myself ridiculous, like any *parvenu*."

"No—that's all rot," the other felt it judicious to urge. "You're perfectly all right, only—only——"

"Only I'm not!" Christian filled in the gap of hesitation with an angry laugh.

Gradually a calmer view of himself pervaded his mind. "It is more difficult than you think, Dicky," he affirmed, after a pause. "It is not easy at all—at first—to—what shall I say?—to keep feeling your feet under you on the solid ground. The temptation to soar, to think you are lifted up, is upon you every minute. It catches you unawares. Ah! I see one must watch that without ceasing. Oh, I am glad—more glad than I can tell you—that you stopped me. Ah! that was a true friend's service."

Dicky chuckled softly: "It's much nicer, if you can take it that way," he admitted.

"If I am ever anything but nice to *you*," Christian began, gravely, and then stopped as if he had bitten his tongue. "Oh, there is patronage again!" he cried with vexation—and then let himself be persuaded to join in the frank laughter that the other set up.

"Oh, we shall hit it off all right," Dicky assured him as a final word on the subject. "It's merely a question of time. You've got

to get accustomed to your new job, and I to mine: that's all there is of it. We shall learn the whole bag of tricks in a week or so, and be happy ever afterward."

The joking refrain struck some welcome chord in Christian's thoughts. He looked up, and noted that they were very near the door leading out from the fruit-garden to the heath beyond the wall. Halting, he smiled into his companion's face.

"No one will follow me now," he said with sparkling eyes. "I will let you turn back here, if you don't mind."

CHAPTER XXVII

Christian realized blankly, all at once, as he stood and gazed out over the moor, that he did not know his way.

The spring had laid upon this great rolling common a beauty of its own. Everywhere, on thorns and furze and briars, the touch of the new life had hung emeralds to bedeck and hide the dun waste of winter. The ashen-gray carpets of old mosses were veined with the vivid green of young growths; out from the dry brown litter of lifeless ferns and bracken were rising the malachite croziers of fresh fronds. The brilliant yellow of broom and gorse blooms caught the eye in all directions, blazing above the vernal outburst of another year's vegetation, and the hum of the bees in the sunlight, and the delicately mingled odors in the May air were a delight to the senses. But under this exuberance of re-awakened nature, welcome though it might be, somehow the landmarks of last autumn seemed to have disappeared.

The path which had led along the wall,

for example, was now nowhere discernible. Or had there really been a path at any time?

It was clear enough, at all events, that his course for some distance lay beside this massive line of ancient masonry, even if no track was marked for him. At some farther point it would be necessary to turn off at a right angle toward the Mere Copse—and here he could recall distinctly that there had been a path. But then he came upon several paths, or vaguely defined grassy depressions which might be paths, and the divergent ways of these were a trouble to him. At last, he decided to strike out more boldly into the heath, independently of paths, and try to get a general view of the landscape. He made his way through creepers and prickly little bushes toward an elevation in the distance, realizing more and more in his encumbered progress that his quest was like that of one who should search the limitless sea for a small boat. There seemed no boundaries whatever to this vast tract of waste land.

As he began at length the ascent of the mound toward which his course had been directed, he scanned the moor near and far, but no human figure was visible. No signs could he discover of any beaten track across it; of the several patches of woodland

beyond, in the distance to the left, he could not even be sure which was the Mere Copse. Below, on the edge of the sky-line at the right, he could see the tops of the towers and chimneys of Caermere. Wheeling round from this point, then, he endeavored to identify that portion of the hill, on the opposite side of the river-chasm, which Kathleen had pointed out to him from the terrace. But, viewed from here, there were so many hills! The hopelessness of his errand became more apparent with each glance round. Despondently, he sauntered up the few remaining yards to the top.

He stood upon the ridge of a grass-grown wall of stones and earth, which in a somewhat irregular circle enclosed perhaps a quarter-acre of land. This wall on its best preserved side, where he found himself, was some dozen feet in height. Across the ring it seemed lower, and at three or four points was broken down altogether. He realized that he was surveying a very ancient structure—no doubt, prehistoric. Would it have been a fortress or a temple, or the primitive mausoleum of some chieftain-ruler in these wilds? One of the openings seemed to suggest by its symmetry an entrance to the enclosure. It was all very curious, and he promised himself that very soon he would

examine it in detail. Some vague promptings of a nascent archæological spirit impelled him now, upon second thoughts, to walk round on the crest of the wall to the other side.

Suddenly he stopped, stared sharply downward with arrested breath, and then, while his face wreathed itself with amused smiles, tip-toed along a few paces farther. Halting here, his eyes dancing with suppressed gaiety, he regarded at his leisure the object of his expedition.

Upon the sunny outer side of the sloping embankment, only a few feet below, was seated Frances Bailey. Her face was turned from him, and she was apparently engrossed in the study of a linen-backed sectional map spread on her knees. A small red book lay in the grass at her side, and he was so close that he could decipher the legend "Shropshire and Cheshire" on its cover.

After a minute's rapturous reflection he turned and noiselessly retraced his steps, till he could descend from the wall without being seen. There was a kind of miniature dry moat surrounding it at this point, and this he lightly vaulted. Then, straightening himself, he strolled forward with as fine an assumption of unsuspecting innocence as he could contrive. It occurred to him to whistle some negligent tune very softly as

he came, but, oddly enough, his lips seemed recalcitrant—they made no sound.

At the obtrusion of his shadow upon the map she was examining she looked swiftly up. For a moment, with the afternoon sun in her eyes, she seemed not to recognize him. There followed another pause, infinitesimal in duration, yet crowded with significance, in which she appeared clearly at a loss what to say or do, now that she realized the fact of his presence. Then she smiled at him with a kind of superficial brightness and tossed the map aside.

"I am fortunate indeed to find you," he said, as he came up, and they shook hands formally. A few moments before, when he had looked down upon her from the mound, he had been buoyantly conscious of his control of the situation; but now that he stood before her it was she who looked down upon him from her vantage-ground on the side of the bank, and somehow this seemed to make a great deal of difference. The sound of his voice in his own ears was unexpectedly solemn and constrained. He felt his deportment to be unpleasantly awkward.

She ignored the implication that he had been looking for her. "I suppose this must be the place that is marked 'tumulus' on the map here," she observed, with what seemed

to be a deliberately casual tone. "But I should think it is more like a rath, such as one reads about in Ireland—a fortified place to defend one's herds and people in. As I understand it, a tumulus was for purposes of burial, and this seems to be a fort rather than a tomb. What is your idea about it?"

She rose to her feet as she put the question, and turned to regard the earthworks above and about her with a concentrated interest.

He tried to laugh. "I'm afraid I'm more ignorant about them than anybody else," he confessed. "I have never been here before. I suppose all one can really say is that the people who did these things knew what they were for, but that since they had no alphabet they could not leave a record to explain them to us, and so we are free to make each his own theory to suit himself."

"That is a very indolent view to take," she told him over her shoulder. "Scientists and archæologists are not contented with that sort of reply. They examine and compare and draw deductions, and get at the meaning of these ancient remains. They do not sit down and fold their hands and say, 'Unfortunately those people had no alphabet.' Why don't you dig this thing up and find out about it?"

He smiled to himself doubtfully. "I have only been in possession of it for about three hours," he reminded her. Then an inspiration came to him. "Would *you* like to dig it up?" he asked, with an effect of eagerness shining through the banter of his tone. "I mean, to superintend the excavations. You shall have forty men out here with picks and shovels to-morrow if you say the word."

Instead of answering, she stooped to get her book and map, and then moved with a preoccupied air to the top of the bank. After an instant's hesitation he scrambled up to join her.

"I suppose that would have been the entrance there," she observed, pointing across the circle. "And in the center, you see, where the grass is so thin, there are evidently big stones there. That *does* suggest interment after all, doesn't it? Yet the Silurians are said to have buried only in dolmens. It is very curious."

"I do not find that I care much about Silurians this afternoon," he ventured to say. There was a gentle hint of reproach in his voice.

"Why, you're one yourself! That is the principal point about the Torrs; that is what makes them interesting."

"But what good does it do me to be a

Silurian and interesting," he protested with a whimsical gesture, "if I—if I do not get what I want most of all in the world?"

"It seems to me that you have got more things already than most people on this planet." She went on reflectively: "I had no idea at all what it meant till I saw these hills and the valleys below them, and the forests and the villages and the castle, and the people coming out from heaven knows what holes in the rocks—all with your collar round their necks. I should think it would either send you mad with the sense of power or frighten you to death."

"I am really very humble about it, I think," he assured her simply. "And there is not so much power as you seem to imagine. It is all a great organized machine, like some big business. The differences are that it works very clumsily and badly as it is at present managed, and that it hardly pays any dividend at all. The average large wholesale grocer's or wine merchant's estate would pay a bigger succession duty than my grandfather's. He died actually a poor man."

The intelligence did not visibly impress her. "But it was not because he helped others," she remarked. "Those about him grew poorer also. It is a hateful system!"

"There is something you do not know,"

he began with gravity. "I said that my grandfather died a poor man. But since his death a tremendous thing has happened. A great gift has been made to me. The enormous debts which encumbered his estates have been wiped out of existence. It is Lord Julius and Emanuel who have done this—done it for me! I do not know the figures yet—to-morrow Mr. Soman is to explain them to me—but the fact is I am a very rich man indeed. I do not owe anybody a penny. Whatever seems to be mine, *is* mine. There are between seventy-five and eighty thousand acres. By comparison with other estates, it seems to me that there will be a yearly income of more than fifty thousand pounds!"

She drew a long breath and looked him in the face. "I am very sorry for you," she said soberly.

"Ah, no; I resist you there," he exclaimed. "I quote your own words to you: 'It is an indolent view to take.' There is a prodigious responsibility! Yes! But all the more reason why I should be brave. Would you have me lose my nerve, and say the task is too great for me? I thought you did not like people who solved difficulties by turning tail and running away. Well, to confess oneself afraid—that is the same thing."

She smiled thoughtfully, perhaps at the quaint recurrence to foreign gestures and an uncertain, hurried use of book-English which her company seemed always to provoke in him. "I meant only that it was a terrible burden you had had fastened upon your shoulders," she made answer softly. "I did not suggest that you were afraid of it. And yet I should think you would be!"

"I think," he responded, with a kind of diffident conviction, "I think that if a man is honest and ambitious for good things, and has some brains, he can grow to be equal to any task that will be laid upon him. And if he labors at it with sincerity and does absolutely the best that there is in him to do, then I do not think that his work will be wasted. A man is only a man after all. He did not make this world, and he cannot do with it what he likes. It is a bigger thing, when you come to think of it, than he is. At the end there is only a little hole in it for him to be buried in and forgotten, as these people who raised this wall that we stand on are forgotten. They thought in their day that the whole world depended upon them; when there was thunder and lightning, they said it was on their account, because their gods in the sky were angry with them. But to us

it is evident that they were not so important as they supposed they were. We look at the work of their hands here, and we regard it with curiosity, as we might an ant's nest. We do not know whether they made it as a tomb for their chief or as a shelter for their cows. And if they had left records to explain that, and it does not matter how much else, it would be the same. We learn only one thing from all the numberless millions who have gone before us—that man is less important than he thinks he is. I have a high position thrust upon me. *Eh bien!* I am not going to command the sun to stand still. I am not going to believe that I ought to revolutionize human society before I die. There will be many men after me. If one or two of them says of me that I worked hard to do well, and that I left things a trifle better than I found them, then what more can I desire?"

She nodded in musing abstraction, but answered nothing. Her gaze was fastened resolutely upon the opposite bank.

"I am truly so fortunate not to have missed you!" he repeated after a small interval of silence.

"Why should you say that?" she asked almost with petulance. "You make too much of me! I do not belong in this gallery

at all. I am very angry with myself for being here. I ought not to have allowed Mrs. Emanuel to persuade me against my own judgment. It did not enter into my head that I should be seen by anybody. I was on my vacation—I take it early, because some of the girls like to get away at Whitsuntide—and at Bath I saw in a paper some reference to the state with which your grandfather would be buried, and the whim seized me to see the funeral. I came on my bicycle most of the way, till the hills got too bad. I thought no one would be the wiser for my coming and going. And one thing —you must not ask me to come into the castle again. I am going to the inn to get my machine, and go down to Craven Arms or Clun for the night. I have looked both roads out on my map. Is Clun interesting, do you know?"

"I have not the remotest idea. In fact, there is only one idea of any sort in my mind just now. It is that you are not to be allowed to go away. Have you seen the dungeons in which we fasten up people whose presence is particularly desired, and who will not listen to reason?"

The jesting tone of his words was belied by the glance in his eyes. She frowned a little. "No, there is no reason in it at all.

What have I to do with these people? They are not my kind. It is the merest accident that you and I happen to be acquainted. If you did not know me now, nothing is more certain than that we should never meet in the world. And our seeming to each other like friends on those other occasions—that had nothing to do with the present. The circumstances are entirely different. There is nothing in common between us now, or hardly anything at all. You ought to understand that. And I look to you to realize how matters are altered, and not to insist upon placing me in a very undignified and unpleasant position." She had spoken with increasing rapidity of utterance, and with rising agitation. "Not that your insisting would make any difference!" she added now, almost defiantly.

He looked at her in silence. The face half turned from him, with its broad brow, its shapely and competent profile, the commanding light in its gray eyes, the firm lips drawn into tightened curves of proud resistance to any weakness of quivering—it was the face that had made so profound an impression upon him at the outset of that wonderful journey from Rouen. The memory became on the instant inexpressibly touching to him. She was almost as she had

been then—it might well be the same sober gray frock, the same hat, save that the ribbon now was black instead of fawn. She would have no varied wardrobe, this girl who earned her own bread, and gave her mind to the large realities of life. But this very simplicity of setting, how notably it emphasized the precious quality of what it framed! He recalled that in his first rapt study of this face it had seemed to him like the face of the young Piedmontese bishop who had once come to his school—pure, wise, sweet, tender, strong. And now, beholding it afresh, it was beyond all these things the face which woke music in his heart—the face of the woman he loved.

With gentle slowness he answered her: "The position I seek to place you in does not seem to me undignified. I should like to hope that you would not find it unpleasant. You know what I mean—I offered it to you in advance, before it was yet mine to give. I beg you again to accept it, now when it *is* mine to give. If you will turn, you can see Caermere from where you stand. It has had in all its days no mistress like you. Will you take it from my hands?"

She confronted him with a clear, steady gaze of disapproval. "All this is very stupid!" she said, peremptorily. "Last

week—it had its pretty and graceful side then perhaps, but it is not nice at all now. It does not flatter me; it does not please me in any way to-day. I told you then, I had my own independence, my own personal pride and dignity, which are dearer to me than anything else. If I had them then, I have them very much more now. What kind of idea of me is this that you have—that I am to change my mind because now you can talk of fifty thousand a year? I like you less than I did when you had nothing at all! For then we seemed to understand each other better. You would not have rattled your money-box at me then! You had finer sensibilities—I liked you more!"

He returned her gaze with a perplexed smile. "But I am asking you to be my wife," he pointed out.

She sniffed with a suggestion of contempt at the word. "Wife!" she told him stormily. "You do not seem to know what the word 'wife' means! You are not thinking of a 'wife' at all. It is a woman to play Duchess to your Duke that you have in mind, and you feel merely that she ought to be presentable and intelligent, and personally not distasteful to you; we'll even say that you prefer a woman towards whom you have felt a sort of comrade's impulse. But that

has nothing to do with a 'wife.' And even on your own ground how foolish you are! In heaven's name, why hit on *me* of all women? There are ten thousand who would do it all vastly better, and who, moreover, would leap at the chance. You have only to look about you. England is full of beauties in training for just such a place. They know the ways of your set—the small talk, the little jokes, the amusements and social duties and distinctions, and all that. Go and find what you want among them. What have I to do with such people? They're not in my class at all."

Christian sighed, and then sought her glance again with a timid, whimsical smile. "Ah, how you badger me always!" he said. "But I have still something more to say."

"Let me beg that it be left unsaid!" She folded up the map, and began moving along the ridge as she spoke. "It is all as distressful to me as can be. You cannot understand—or will not understand—and it puts me in an utterly hateful position. I do not like to be saying unpleasant things to you. I had only the nicest feelings towards you when we last parted; and this noon, when I saw you in the church, you made a picture in my mind that I had quite—quite a tenderness for. But now you force me into dis-

agreeable feelings and words, which I don't like any more than you do. I seem to be never myself when I am with you. I have actually never seen you but three times, and you disturb me more—you make me hate myself more—than everything else in the world."

The exigencies of the path along the summit of the mound forced Christian to walk behind her. In the voice which carried these words backward to him the quavering stress of profound emotion was more to him than the words themselves. He put out his hand and laid it lightly upon her arm.

"It is because you feel in your heart of hearts that I love you," he said in a low, tremulous voice. "Can you not see? It is that that has made all our meetings disturbed, full of misunderstandings as well as pleasure. You wrong me, dear—or no, you could not do that, but it is that you do not comprehend. I have loved you from that first day. Oh, I have loved you always, since I can remember—long years before I saw you. There is not any memory in my life, it seems, but of you—for all the sweet things were a foretaste of you, and all the bitter are forgotten because of you. And shall there not be an end now to our hurting each other? For where you go I follow you,

and I must always be longing for you—and I do not believe that in your heart you hold yourself away from me, but only in your mind."

She had drawn her sleeve from his touch, and irresolutely quickened her steps. She perforce paused now at a broken gap in the bank, and with books and gathered skirts in one hand, lifted the other in instinctively balancing preparation for a descent. He took this hand, and she made no demur to his leading her down the steep slope to the level outer ground. He retained the hand reverently, gently in his own as they walked in silence across the heath. It seemed ever as if she would take it from him, and that he consciously exerted a magic through his touch which just sufficed to hold it.

With a bowed head, and cheek at once flushed and white, she began to speak. "You are very young," she said, lingering over the words with almost dejection in her tone. "You know so little of what life is like! You have such a place in the affairs of men to fill, and you come to it with such innocent boyish good faith—and men are so little like what you think they are. And as you learn the lesson—the hardening, disillusionizing lesson of the world—and the soft, youthful places in your nature toughen, and

you are a man holding your own with other men, and lording it over them where you can, then you will hate the things which hamper you, and you will curse encumbrances that you took on you in your ignorance. And you are all wrong about me! It is because you do not know other women that you think well of me. I am a very ordinary girl, indeed. There are thousands like me, and better than me, with more courage and finer characters, and you do not know them, that is all. And there are the young women of your own little world, who are born and reared to be the wives of men in your place, and you will see them——"

"I have seen them," he interposed softly.

"But it is not fair!" she hurried on breathlessly. "It is the duty of a friend to hold a man back when he is bent on a folly. And we pledged ourselves to be true friends, and I implore you—or no, I insist! I will not have it. It is too cruelly unfair to you—and —I am going now—no, not that way; in the other direction. We will say good-bye."

He would not relinquish the hand she strove to drag away. All the calmness of confident mastery was in his hold upon this hand, and in the gravely sweet cadence of his voice. "I love you," he said. "I shall love no one in my life, or in another life, but

you. I will not live without you. I will not willingly spend a day in all my years away from you. You are truly my other half—the companion, the friend, the love, the wife, without whom nothing exists for me. I am not young as you say I am, and I shall never be old—for in this love there is no youth or age for either of us. Try to look backward now! Can you see a time when we did not love each other? And forward! Is it thinkable that we can be parted?"

Slowly she lifted her head.

"Look at me!" she bade him in a voice he seemed never to have heard before.

THE END

THE MARKET-PLACE

"WILL BRING IN OVER FOUR HUNDRED THOUSAND POUNDS, AND CLOSE THE 'CORNER'."—*Page 268.*

THE MARKET-PLACE

CHAPTER I

THE battle was over, and the victor remained on the field—sitting alone with the hurly-burly of his thoughts.

His triumph was so sweeping and comprehensive as to be somewhat shapeless to the view. He had a sense of fascinated pain when he tried to define to himself what its limits would probably be. Vistas of unchecked, expanding conquest stretched away in every direction. He held at his mercy everything within sight. Indeed, it rested entirely with him to say whether there should be any such thing as mercy at all—and until he chose to utter the restraining word the rout of the vanquished would go on with multiplying terrors and ruin. He could crush and torture and despoil his enemies until he was tired. The responsibility of having to decide when he would stop grinding their faces might come to weigh upon him later on, but he would not give it room in his mind tonight.

A picture of these faces of his victims shaped itself out of the flames in the grate. They were moulded in a family likeness, these phantom visages: they were all Jewish, all malignant, all distorted with fright. They

implored him with eyes in which panic asserted itself above rage and cunning. Only here and there did he recall a name with which to label one of these countenances; very few of them raised a memory of individual rancour. The faces were those of men he had seen, no doubt, but their persecution of him had been impersonal ; his great revenge was equally so. As he looked, in truth, there was only one face—a composite mask of what he had done battle with, and overthrown, and would trample implacably under foot. He stared with a conqueror's cold frown at it, and gave an abrupt laugh which started harsh echoes in the stillness of the Board Room. Then he shook off the reverie, and got to his feet. He shivered a little at the sudden touch of a chill.

A bottle of brandy, surrounded by glasses, stood on the table where the two least-considered of his lieutenants, the dummy Directors, had left it. He poured a small quantity and sipped it. During the whole eventful day it had not occurred to him before to drink ; the taste of the neat liquor seemed on the instant to calm and refresh his brain. With more deliberation, he took a cigar from the broad, floridly-decorated open box beside the bottle, lit it, and blew a long draught of smoke thoughtfully through his nostrils. Then he put his hands in his pockets, looked again into the fire, and sighed a wondering smile. God in heaven ! it was actually true !

This man of forty found himself fluttering with a novel exhilaration, which yet was not novel. Upon reflection, he perceived that he felt as if he were a boy again—a boy excited by pleasure. It surprised as much as it delighted him to experience this frank and direct joy of a child. He caught the inkling of an idea that perhaps his years were an illusion. He had latterly been thinking of himself as middle-aged ; the grey hairs thickening at his temples

had vaguely depressed him. Now all at once he saw that he was not old at all. The buoyancy of veritable youth bubbled in his veins. He began walking up and down the room, regarding new halcyon visions with a sparkling eye. He was no longer conscious of the hated foe beneath his feet; they trod instead elastic upon the clouds.

The sound of someone moving about in the hallway outside, and of trying a door near by, suddenly caught his attention. He stood still and listened with alertness for a surprised instant, then shrugged his shoulders and began moving again. It must be nearly seven o'clock; although the allotment work had kept the clerks later than usual that day, everybody connected with the offices had certainly gone home. He realized that his nerves had played him a trick in giving that alarmed momentary start—and smiled almost tenderly as he remembered how notable and even glorious a warrant those nerves had for their unsettled state. They would be all right after a night's real rest. He would know how to sleep *now*, thank God!

But yes—there was somebody outside—and this time knocking with assurance at the right door, the entrance to the outer office. After a second's consideration, he went into this unlighted outer office, and called out through the opaque glass an enquiry. The sound of his voice, as it analyzed itself in his own ears, seemed unduly peremptory. The answer which came back brought a flash of wonderment to his eyes. He hurriedly unlocked and opened the door.

"I saw the lights in what I made out to be the Board Room," said the newcomer, as he entered. "I assumed it must be you. Hope I don't interrupt anything."

"Nothing could have given me greater pleasure, Lord

Plowden," replied the other, leading the way back to the inner apartment. "In fact, I could n't have asked anything better."

The tone of his voice had a certain anxious note in it not quite in harmony with this declaration. He turned, under the drop-light overhanging the Board-table, and shook hands with his guest, as if to atone for this doubtful accent.

"I shake hands with you again," he said, speaking rapidly, "because this afternoon it was what you may call formal; it did n't count. And—my God!—you 're the man I owe it all to."

"Oh, you must n't go as far as that—even in the absence of witnesses," replied Lord Plowden, lightly. "I 'll take off my coat for a few minutes," he went on, very much at his ease. "It 's hot in here. It 's by the merest chance I happened to be detained in the City—and I saw your lights, and this afternoon we had no opportunity whatever for a quiet talk. No—I won't drink anything before dinner, but I 'll light a cigar. I want to say to you, Thorpe," he concluded, as he seated himself, "that I think what you 've done is very wonderful. The Marquis thinks so too—but I should n't like to swear that he understands much about it."

The implication that the speaker did understand remained in the air like a tangible object. Thorpe took a chair, and the two men exchanged a silent, intent look. Their faces, dusky red on the side of the glow from the fire, pallid where the electric light fell slantwise upon them from above, had for a moment a mysterious something in common. Then the tension of the glance was relaxed—and on the instant no two men in London looked less alike.

Lord Plowden was familiarly spoken of as a handsome

man. Thorpe had even heard him called the handsomest man in England—though this seemed in all likelihood an exaggeration. But handsome he undoubtedly was—tall without suggesting the thought of height to the observer, erect yet graceful, powerfully built, while preserving the effect of slenderness. His face in repose had the outline of the more youthful guardsman-type—regular, finely-cut, impassive to hardness. When he talked, or followed with interest the talk of others, it revealed almost an excess of animation. Then one noted the flashing subtlety of his glance, the swift facility of his smile and comprehending brows, and saw that it was not the guardsman face at all. His skin was fresh-hued, and there was a shade of warm brown in his small, well-ordered moustache, but his hair, wavy and worn longer than the fashion, seemed black. There were perceptible veins of grey in it, though he had only entered his thirty-fifth year. He was dressed habitually with the utmost possible care.

The contrast between this personage and the older man confronting him was abrupt. Thorpe was also tall, but of a burly and slouching figure. His face, shrouded in a high-growing, dust-coloured beard, invited no attention. One seemed always to have known this face—thick-featured, immobile, undistinguished. Its accessories for the time being were even more than ordinarily unimpressive. Both hair and beard were ragged with neglect. His commonplace, dark clothes looked as if he had slept in them. The hands resting on his big knees were coarse in shape, and roughened, and ill-kept.

"I could n't have asked anything better than your dropping in," he repeated now, speaking with a drag, as of caution, on his words. "Witnesses or no witnesses, I 'm anxious to have you understand that I realize what I owe to you."

"I only wish it were a great deal more than it is," replied the other, with a frank smile.

"Oh, it 'll mount up to considerable, as it stands," said Thorpe.

He could hear that there was a kind of reservation in his voice; the suspicion that his companion detected it embarrassed him. He found himself in the position of fencing with a man to whom all his feelings impelled him to be perfectly open. He paused, and was awkwardly conscious of constraint in the silence which ensued.

"You are very kind to put it in that way," said Lord Plowden, at last. He seemed also to be finding words for his thoughts with a certain difficulty. He turned his cigar round in his white fingers meditatively. "I gather that your success has been complete—as complete as you yourself could have desired. I congratulate you with all my heart."

"No—don't say my success—say our success," put in Thorpe.

"But, my dear man," the other corrected him, "my interest, compared with yours, is hardly more than nominal. I 'm a Director, of course, and I 'm not displeased that my few shares should be worth something instead of nothing, but——"

Thorpe lifted one of his heavy hands. "That is n't my view of the thing at all. To be frank, I was turning over in my mind, just awhile ago, before you came in, some way of arranging all that on a different footing. If you 'll trust it to me, I think you 'll find it 's all right."

Something in the form of this remark seemed to restore to Lord Plowden his accustomed fluency of speech.

"I came here to say precisely that thing," he began—"that I do trust it to you. We have never had any very definite talk on the subject—and pray don't think that I

want to go into details now. I 'd much rather not, in fact. But what I do want to say to you is this : I believe in you. I feel sure that you are going to go far, as the saying is. Well, I want to tie myself to your star. Do you see what I mean ? You are going to be a power in finance. You are going to be able to make and unmake men as you choose. I should be very much obliged indeed if you would make me."

Thorpe regarded the handsome and titled man of fashion with what seemed to the other a lethargic gaze. In truth, his mind was toiling with strenuous activity to master, in all its bearings, the significance of what had been said. This habit of the abstracted and lack-lustre eye, the while he was hard at work thinking, was a fortuitous asset which he had never up to that time learned that he possessed. Unconsciously, he dampened the spirits of his companion.

" Don't imagine I 'm trying to force myself upon you," Lord Plowden said, growing cool in the face of this slow stare. " I 'm asking nothing at all. I had the impulse to come and say to you that you are a great man, and that you 've done a great thing—and done it, moreover, in a very great way."

" You know how it was done ! " The wondering exclamation forced itself from Thorpe's unready lips. He bent forward a little, and took a new visual hold, as it were, of his companion's countenance.

Lord Plowden smiled. " Did you think I was such a hopeless duffer, then ? " he rejoined.

For answer, Thorpe leant back in his chair, crossed his legs, and patted his knee contentedly. All at once his face had lightened ; a genial speculation returned to his grey eyes.

" Well, I was in a curious position about you, you see," he began to explain. The relief with which he spoke was

palpable. "I could not for the life of me make up my mind whether to tell you about it or not. Let 's see—this is Thursday ; did I see you Tuesday ? At any rate, the scheme did n't dawn on me myself until toward evening Tuesday. But yesterday, of course, I could have told you —and again this afternoon—but, as I say, I could n't make up my mind. Once I had it on the tip of my tongue —but somehow I did n't. And you—you never gave me a hint that you saw what was going on."

Again Lord Plowden smiled. "I voted with you," he put in softly.

Thorpe laughed, and relit his cigar. "Well, I could n't have asked anything better than this," he declared once again. "It beats all the rest put together, to my mind."

"Perhaps I don't quite follow your meaning," commented the other tentatively.

"Why man," Thorpe explained, hesitating a little in his choice of words, but speaking with evident fervour ; "I was more anxious about you—and the way you 'd take it—than about anything else. I give you my word I was. I could n't tell at all how you 'd feel about the thing. You might think that it was all right, and then again you might round on me—or no, I don't mean quite that—but you might say it was n't good enough for you, and wash your hands of the whole affair. And I can't tell you what a relief it is to find that you—that you 're satisfied. Now I can go ahead."

"Ah, yes—ahead," said the younger man, thoughtfully. "Do you mind telling me—you see I 'm quite in the dark as to details—how much further ahead we are likely to go ? I comprehend the general nature of our advance—but how far off is the goal you have in sight ?"

"God knows !" answered Thorpe, with a rising thrill of excitement in his voice. "I don't give it any limit. I

don't see why we should stop at all. We 've got them in such a position that—why, good heavens ! we can squeeze them to death, crush them like quartz." He chuckled grimly at the suggestion of his simile. " We 'll get more ounces to the ton out of our crushings than they ever heard of on the Rand, too."

" Might I ask," interposed the other, " who may ' they ' be ? "

Thorpe hesitated, and knitted his brows in the effort to remember names. " Oh, there are a lot of them," he said, vaguely. " I think I told you of the way that Kaffir crowd pretended to think well of me, and let me believe they were going to take me up, and then, because I would n't give them everything—the very shirt off my back—turned and put their knife into me. I don't know them apart, hardly—they 've all got names like Rhine wines—but I know the gang as a whole, and if I don't lift the roof clean off their particular synagogue, then my name is mud."

Lord Plowden smiled. " I 've always the greatest difficulty to remember that you are an Englishman—a Londoner born," he declared pleasantly. " You don't talk in the least like one. On shipboard I made sure you were an American—a very characteristic one, I thought—of some curious Western variety, you know. I never was more surprised in my life than when you told me, the other day, that you only left England a few years ago."

" Oh, hardly a ' few years ' ; more like fifteen," Thorpe corrected him. He studied his companion's face with slow deliberation.

" I 'm going to say something that you must n't take amiss," he remarked, after a little pause. " If you 'd known that I was an Englishman, when we first met, there on the steamer, I kind o' suspect that you and I 'd

never have got much beyond a nodding acquaintance—and even that mostly on my side. I don't mean that I intended to conceal anything—that is, not specially—but I 've often thought since that it was a mighty good thing I did. Now is n't that true—that if you had taken me for one of your own countrymen you 'd have given me the cold shoulder ? ''

" I dare say there 's a good deal in what you say," the other admitted, gently enough, but without contrition. " Things naturally shape themselves that way, rather, you know. If they did n't, why then the whole position would become difficult. But you are an American, to all intents and purposes."

" Oh, no—I never took any step towards getting naturalized," Thorpe protested. " I always intended to come back here. Or no, I won't say that—because most of the time I was dog-poor—and this is n't the place for a poor man. But I always said to myself that if ever I pulled it off—if I ever found myself a rich man—*then* I 'd come piking across the Atlantic as fast as triple-expansion engines would carry me."

The young man smiled again, with a whimsical gleam in his eye. " And you *are* a rich man, now," he observed, after a momentary pause.

" We are both rich men," replied Thorpe, gravely.

He held up a dissuading hand, as the other would have spoken. " This is how it seems to me the thing figures itself out : It can't be said that your name on the Board, or the Marquis's either, was of much use so far as the public were concerned. To tell the truth, I saw some time ago that they would n't be. Titles on prospectuses are played out in London. I 've rather a notion, indeed, that they 're apt to do more harm than good—just at present, at least. But all that aside—you are the man

who was civil to me at the start, when you knew nothing whatever about my scheme, and you are the man who was good to me later on, when I did n't know where to turn for a friendly word. Very well ; here I am ! I 've made my *coup !* And I 'd be a sweep, would n't I ? to forget to-day what I was so glad to remember a week ago. But you see, I don't forget ! The capital of the Company is £500,000, all in pound shares. We offered the public only a fifth of them. The other four hundred thousand shares are mine as vendor—and I have ear-marked in my mind one hundred thousand of them to be yours."

Lord Plowden's face paled at the significance of these words. " It is too much—you don't reflect what it is you are saying," he murmured confusedly.

" Not a bit of it," the other reassured him. " Everything that I 've said goes."

The peer, trembling a little, rose to his feet. " It is a preposterously big reward for the merest act of courtesy," he insisted. " Of course it takes my breath away for joy—and yet I feel I ought n't to be consenting to it at all. And it has its unpleasant side—it buries me under a mountain of obligation. I don't know what to do or what to say."

" Well, leave the saying and doing to me, then," replied Thorpe, with a gesture before which the other resumed his seat. " Just a word more—and then I suppose we 'd better be going. Look at it in this way. Your grandfather was Lord Chancellor of England, and your father was a General in the Crimea. My grandfather kept a small second-hand book-shop, and my father followed him in the business. In one sense, that puts us ten thousand miles apart. But in another sense, we 'll say that we like each other, and that there are ways in which we can be of immense use to each other, and that brings us

close together. You need money—and here it is for you. I need—what shall I say?—a kind of friendly lead in the matter of establishing myself on the right footing, among the right people—and that 's what you can do for me. Mind—I 'd prefer to put it all in quite another way ; I 'd like to say it was all niceness on your part, all gratitude on mine. But if you want to consider it on a business basis—why there you have it also—perfectly plain and clear."

He got up as he finished, and Lord Plowden rose as well. The two men shook hands in silence.

When the latter spoke, it was to say : " Do you know how to open one of those soda-water bottles? I 've tried, but I can never get the trick. I think I should like to have a drink—after this."

When they had put down their glasses, and the younger man was getting into his great-coat, Thorpe bestowed the brandy and cigars within a cabinet at the corner of the room, and carefully turned a key upon them.

" If you 're going West, let me give you a lift," said Lord Plowden, hat in hand. " I can set you down wherever you like. Unfortunately I 've to go out to dinner, and I must race, as it is, to get dressed."

Thorpe shook his head. " No, go along," he bade him. " I 've some odds and ends of things to do on the way."

" Then when shall I see you? "—began the other, and halted suddenly with a new thought in his glance. " But what are you doing Saturday? " he asked, in a brisker tone. " It 's a *dies non* here. Come down with me to-morrow evening, to my place in Kent. We will shoot on Saturday, and drive about on Sunday, if you like—and there we can talk at our leisure. Yes, that is what you must do. I have a gun for you. Shall we say, then—

Charing Cross at 9.55 ? Or better still, say 5.15, and we will dine at home."

The elder man pondered his answer—frowning at the problem before him with visible anxiety. "I 'm afraid I 'd better not come—it 's very good of you all the same."

"Nonsense," retorted the other. "My mother will be very glad indeed to see you. There is no one else there —unless, perhaps, my sister has some friend down. We shall make a purely family party."

Thorpe hesitated for only a further second. "All right. Charing Cross, 5.15," he said then, with the grave brevity of one who announces a momentous decision.

He stood still, looking into the fire, for a few moments after his companion had gone. Then, going to a closet at the end of the room, he brought forth his coat and hat ; something prompted him to hold them up, and scrutinize them under the bright light of the electric globe. He put them on, then, with a smile, half-scornful, half-amused, playing in his beard.

The touch of a button precipitated darkness upon the Board Room. He made his way out, and downstairs to the street. It was a rainy, windy October night, sloppy underfoot, dripping overhead. At the corner before him, a cabman, motionless under his unshapely covered hat and glistening rubber cape, sat perched aloft on his seat, apparently asleep. Thorpe hailed him, with a peremptory tone, and gave the brusque order, "Strand !" as he clambered into the hansom.

CHAPTER II

"LOUISA, the long and short of it is this," said Thorpe, half an hour later: "you never did believe in me, as a sister should do."

He was seated alone with this sister, in a small, low, rather dismally-appointed room, half-heartedly lighted by two flickering gas-jets. They sat somewhat apart, confronting a fireplace, where only the laid materials for a fire disclosed themselves in the cold grate. Above the mantel hung an enlarged photograph of a scowling old man. Thorpe's gaze recurred automatically at brief intervals to this portrait—which somehow produced the effect upon him of responsibility for the cheerlessness of the room. There were other pictures on the walls of which he was dimly conscious—small, faded, old prints about Dido and Æneas and Agamemnon, which seemed to be coming back to him out of the mists of his childhood.

Vagrant impressions and associations of this childhood strayed with quaint inconsequence across the field of his preoccupied mind. The peculiar odour of the ancient book-shop on the floor below remained like snuff in his nostrils. Somewhere underneath, or in the wainscoting at the side, he could hear the assiduous gnawing of a rat. Was it the same rat, he wondered with a mental grin, that used to keep him awake nights, in one of the rooms next to this, with that same foolish noise, when he was a boy?

"I know you always say that," replied Louisa, impassively.

She was years older than her brother, but, without a trace of artifice or intention, contrived to look the younger of the two. Her thick hair, drawn simply from her temples into a knot behind, was of that palest brown which assimilates grey. Her face, long, plain, masculine in contour and spirit, conveyed no message as to years. Long and spare of figure, she sat upright in her straight-backed chair, with her large, capable hands on her knees.

"I believed in you as much as you 'd let me," she went on, indifferently, almost wearily. "But I don't see that it mattered to you whether I did or did n't. You went your own way: you did what you wanted to do. What had I to do with it? I don't suppose I even knew what part of the world you were in more than once in two or three years. How should I know whether you were going to succeed, when I did n't even know what it was you were at? Certainly you had n't succeeded here in London—but elsewhere you might or you might not—how could I tell? And moreover, I don't feel that I know you very well; you 've grown into something very different from the boy Joel that left the shop—it must be twenty years ago. I can only know about you and your affairs what you tell me."

"But my point is," pursued Thorpe, watching her face with a curiously intent glance, "you never said to yourself: 'I *know* he 's going to succeed. I *know* he 'll be a rich man before he dies.'"

She shook her head dispassionately. Her manner expressed fatigued failure to comprehend why he was making so much of this purposeless point.

"No—I don't remember ever having said that to myself," she admitted, listlessly. Then a comment upon his words occurred to her, and she spoke with more animation: "You don't seem to understand, Joel, that what

was very important to you, did n't occupy me at all. You were always talking about getting rich ; you kept the idea before you of sometime, at a stroke, finding yourself a millionaire. That 's been the idea of your life. But what do I know about all that? My work has been to keep a roof over my head—to keep the little business from disappearing altogether. It 's been hard enough, I can tell you, these last few years, with the big jobbers cutting the hearts out of the small traders. I had the invalid husband to support for between three and four years—a dead weight on me every week—and then the children to look after, to clothe and educate."

At the last word she hesitated suddenly, and looked at him. " Don't think I 'm ungrateful "—she went on, with a troubled effort at a smile—" but I almost wish you 'd never sent me that four hundred pounds at all. What it means is that they 've had two years at schools where now I shan't be able to keep them any longer. They 'll be spoiled for my kind of life—and they won't have a fair chance for any other. I don't know what will become of them."

The profound apprehension in the mother's voice did not dull the gleam in Thorpe's eyes. He even began a smile in the shadows of his unkempt moustache.

" But when I sent that money, for example, two years ago, and over," he persisted, doggedly—" and I told you there 'd be more where that came from, and that I stood to pull off the great event—even then, now, you did n't believe in your innermost heart that I knew what I was talking about, did you? "

She frowned with impatience as she turned toward him. " For heaven's sake, Joel," she said, sharply—" you become a bore with that stupid nonsense. I want to be patient with you—I do indeed sympathize with you in

your misfortunes—you know that well enough—but you 're very tiresome with that eternal harping on what I believed and what I did n't believe. Now, are you going to stop to supper or not?—because if you are I must send the maid out. And there 's another thing—would it be of any help to you to bring your things here from the hotel? You can have Alfred's room as well as not—till Christmas, at least."

"Supposing I could n't get my luggage out of the hotel till I 'd settled my bill," suggested Thorpe tentatively, in a muffled voice.

The practical woman reflected for an instant. "I was thinking," she confessed then, "that it might be cheaper to leave your things there, and buy what little you want—I don't imagine, from what I 've seen, that your wardrobe is so very valuable—but no, I suppose the bill ought to be paid. Perhaps it can be managed; how much will it be?"

Thorpe musingly rose to his feet, and strolled over to her chair. With his thick hands on his sister's shoulders he stooped and kissed her on the forehead.

"You believe in me now, anyway, eh, Lou?" he said, as he straightened himself behind her.

The unaccustomed caress—so different in character from the perfunctory salute with which he had greeted her on his arrival from foreign parts, six months before—brought a flush of pleased surprise to her plain face. Then a kind of bewilderment crept into the abstracted gaze she was bending upon the fireless grate. Something extraordinary, unaccountable, was in the manner of her brother. She recalled that, in truth, he was more than half a stranger to her. How could she tell what wild, uncanny second nature had not grown up in him under those outlandish tropical skies? He had just told

her that his ruin was absolute—overwhelming—yet there had been a covert smile in the recesses of his glance. Even now, she half felt, half heard, a chuckle from him, there as he stood behind her!

The swift thought that disaster had shaken his brain loomed up and possessed her. She flung herself out of the chair, and, wheeling, seized its back and drew it between them as she faced him. It was with a stare of frank dismay that she beheld him grinning at her.

"What"—she began, stammering—"What is the matter, Joel?"

He permitted himself the luxury of smiling blankly at her for a further moment. Then he tossed his head, and laughed abruptly.

"Sit down, old girl," he adjured her. "Try and hold yourself together, now—to hear some different kind of news. I 've been playing it rather low down on you, for a fact. Instead of my being smashed, it 's the other way about."

She continued to confront him, with a nervous clasp upon the chair-back. Her breathing troubled her as she regarded him, and tried to take in the meaning of his words.

"Do you mean—you 've been lying to me about—about your Company?" she asked, confusedly.

"No—no—not at all," he replied, now all genial heartiness. "No—what I told you was gospel truth—but I was taking a rise out of you all the same."

He seemed so unaffectedly pleased by his achievement in kindly duplicity that she forced an awkward smile to her lips.

"I don't understand in the least," she said, striving to remember what he had told her. "What you said was that the public had entirely failed to come in—that there

were n't enough applications for shares to pay flotation expenses—those were your own words. Of course, I don't pretend to understand these City matters—but it *is* the case, is n't it, that if people don't subscribe for the shares of a new company, then the company is a failure?"

"Yes, that may be said to be the case—as a general rule," he nodded at her, still beaming.

"Well, then—of course—I don't understand," she owned.

"I don't know as you 'll understand it much more when I 've explained it to you," he said, seating himself, and motioning her to the other chair. "But yes, of course you will. You 're a business woman. You know what figures mean. And really the whole thing is as simple as A B C. You remember that I told you——"

"But *are* you going to stop to supper? I must send Annie out before the shops close."

"Supper? No—I could n't eat anything. I 'm too worked up for that. I 'll get something at the hotel before I go to bed, if I feel like it. But say!"—the thought suddenly struck him—"if you want to come out with me, I 'll blow you off to the swaggerest dinner in London. What d' ye say?"

She shook her head. "I shall have some bread and cheese and beer at nine. That 's my rule, you know. I don't like to break it. I 'm always queer next day if I do. But now make haste and tell me—you 're really not broken then? You have really come out well?"

For answer he rose, and drew himself to his full height, and spread his bulky shoulders backward. His grey-blue eyes looked down upon her with a triumphant glow.

"Broken?" he echoed her word, with emphasis. "My dear Louisa, I 'm not the sort that gets broken. I break other people. Oh, God, how I shall break them!"

He began pacing up and down on the narrow rug before the fender, excitedly telling his story to her. Sometimes he threw the words over his shoulder ; again he held her absorbed gaze with his. He took his hands often from his pockets, to illustrate or enforce by gestures the meaning of his speech—and then she found it peculiarly difficult to realize that he was her brother.

Much of the narrative, rambling and disconnected, with which he prefaced this story of the day, was vaguely familiar to her. He sketched now for her in summary, and with the sonorous voice of one deeply impressed with the dramatic values of his declamation, the chronicle of his wanderings in strange lands—and these he had frequently told her about before. Soon she perceived, however, that he was stringing them together on a new thread. One after another, these experiences of his, as he related them, turned upon the obstacles and fatal pitfalls which treachery and malice had put in his path. He seemed, by his account, to have been a hundred times almost within touch of the goal. In China, in the Dutch Indies, in those remoter parts of Australia which were a waterless waste when he knew them and might have owned them, and now were yielding fabulous millions to fellows who had tricked and swindled him—everywhere he had missed by just a hair's breadth the golden consummation. In the Western hemisphere the tale repeated itself. There had been times in the Argentine, in Brazil just before the Empire fell, in Colorado when the Silver boom was on, in British Columbia when the first rumours of rich ore were whispered about—many times when fortune seemed veritably within his grasp. But someone had always played him false. There was never a friendship for him which could withstand the temptation of profitable treason.

But he had hung dauntlessly on. He had seen one

concession slipping through his fingers, only to strain and tighten them for a clutch at another. It did not surprise his hearer—nor indeed did it particularly attract her attention—that there was nowhere in this rapid and comprehensive narrative any allusion to industry of the wage-earning sort. Apparently, he had done no work at all, in the bread-winner's sense of the word. This was so like Joel that it was taken for granted in his sister's mind. All his voyages and adventures and painful enterprises had been informed by the desire of the buccaneer—the passion to reap where others had sown, or, at the worst, to get something for nothing.

The discursive story began to narrow and concentrate itself when at last it reached Mexico. The sister changed her position in her chair, and crossed her knees when Tehuantepec was mentioned. It was from that place that Joel had sent her the amazing remittance over two years ago. Curiously enough, though, it was at this point in his narrative that he now became vague as to details. There were concessions of rubber forests mentioned, and the barter of these for other concessions with money to boot, and varying phases of a chronic trouble about where the true boundary of Guatemala ran—but she failed clearly to understand much about it all. His other schemes and mishaps she had followed readily enough. Somehow when they came to Mexico, however, she saw everything jumbled and distorted, as through a haze. Once or twice she interrupted him to ask questions, but he seemed to attach such slight importance to her comprehending these details that she forbore. Only one fact was it necessary to grasp about the Mexican episode, apparently. When he quitted Tehuantepec, to make his way straight to London, at the beginning of the year, he left behind him a rubber plantation which he desired to sell, and brought with him be-

tween six and seven thousand pounds, with which to pay the expenses of selling it. How he had obtained either the plantation or the money did not seem to have made itself understood. No doubt, as his manner indicated when she ventured her enquiries, it was quite irrelevant to the narrative.

In Mexico, his experience had been unique, apparently, in that no villain had appeared on the scene to frustrate his plans. He at least mentioned no one who had wronged him there. When he came to London, however, there were villains and to spare. He moved to the mantel, when he arrived at this stage of the story, and made clear a space for his elbow to rest among the little trinkets and photographs with which it was burdened. He stood still thereafter, looking down at her; his voice took on a harsher note.

Much of this story, also, she knew by heart. This strange, bearded, greyish-haired brother of hers had come very often during the past half-year to the little book-shop, and the widow's home above it, his misshapen handbag full of papers, his heart full of rage, hope, grief, ambition, disgust, confidence—everything but despair. It was true, it had never been quite real to her. He was right in his suggestion that she had never wholly believed in him. She had not been able to take altogether seriously this clumsy, careworn, shabbily-dressed man who talked about millions. It was true that he had sent her four hundred pounds for the education of her son and daughter; it was equally true that he had brought with him to London a sum which any of his ancestors, so far as she knew about them, would have deemed a fortune, and which he treated as merely so much oil, with which to lubricate the machinery of his great enterprise. She had heard, at various times, the embittered details of the disappearance of this money,

little by little. Nearly a quarter of it, all told, had been appropriated by a sleek old braggart of a company-promoter, who had cozened Joel into the belief that London could be best approached through him. When at last this wretch was kicked downstairs, the effect had been only to make room for a fresh lot of bloodsuckers. There were so-called advertising agents, so-called journalists, so-called "men of influence in the City,"—a swarm of relentless and voracious harpies, who dragged from him in blackmail nearly the half of what he had left, before he summoned the courage and decision to shut them out.

Worse still, in some ways, were the men into whose hands he stumbled next—a group of City men concerned in the South African market, who impressed him very favourably at the outset. He got to know them by accident, and at the time when he began to comprehend the necessity of securing influential support for his scheme. Everything that he heard and could learn about them testified to the strength of their position in the City. Because they displayed a certain amiability of manner toward him and his project, he allowed himself to make sure of their support. It grew to be a certainty in his mind that they would see him through. He spent a good deal of money in dinners and suppers in their honour, after they had let him understand that this form of propitiation was not unpleasant to them. They chaffed him about some newspaper paragraphs, in which he was described as the "Rubber King," with an affable assumption of amusement, under which he believed that he detected a genuine respect for his abilities.

Finally, when he had danced attendance upon them for the better part of two months, he laid before them, at the coffee-and-cigars stage of a dinner in a private room of the Savoy, the details of his proposition. They were to form

a Syndicate to take over his property, and place it upon the market ; in consideration of their finding the ready money for this exploitation, they were to have for themselves two-fifths of the shares in the Company ultimately to be floated. They listened to these details, and to his enthusiastic remarks about the project itself, with rather perfunctory patience, but committed themselves that evening to nothing definite. It took him nearly a week thereafter to get an answer from any of them. Then he learned that, if they took the matter up at all, it would be upon the basis of the Syndicate receiving nine-tenths of the shares.

He conceived the idea, after he had mastered his original amazement, that they named these preposterous terms merely because they expected to be beaten down, and he summoned all his good nature and tact for the task of haggling with them. He misunderstood their first show of impatience at this, and persevered in the face of their tacit rebuffs. Then, one day, a couple of them treated him with overt rudeness, and he, astonished out of his caution, replied to them in kind. Suddenly, he could hardly tell why or how, they were all enemies of his. They closed their office doors to him ; even their clerks treated him with contemptuous incivility.

This blow to his pride enraged and humiliated him, curiously enough, as no other misadventure of his life had done.

Louisa remembered vividly the description he had given to her, at the time, of this affair. She had hardly understood why it should disturb him so profoundly : to her mind, these men had done nothing so monstrous after all. But to him, their offense swallowed up all the other indignities suffered during the years of his Ishmaelitish wanderings. A sombre lust for vengeance upon them took root

in his very soul. He hated nobody else as he hated them. How often she had heard him swear, in solemn vibrating tones, that to the day of his death his most sacred ambition should be their punishment, their abasement in the dust and mire!

And now, all at once, as she looked up at him, where he leant against the mantel, these vagabond memories of hers took point and shape. It was about these very men that he was talking.

"And think of it!" he was saying, impressively. "It 's magnificent enough for me to make this great hit—but I don't count it as anything at all by comparison with the fact that I make it at their expense. You remember the fellows I told you about?" he asked abruptly, deferring to the confused look on her face.

"Yes—you make it out of them," she repeated, in an uncertain voice. It occurred to her that she must have been almost asleep. "But did I miss anything? Have you been telling what it is that you have made?"

"No—that you shall have in good time. You don't seem to realize it, Louisa. I can hardly realize it myself. I am actually a very rich man. I can't tell how much I 've got—in fact, it can be almost as much as I like—half a million pounds, I suppose, at the start, if I want to make it that much. Yes—it takes the breath away, does n't it? But best of all—a thousand times best of all—practically every dollar of it comes out of those Kaffir swine—the very men that tried to rob me, and that have been trying to ruin me ever since. I tell you what I wish, Louise—I wish to God there could only be time enough, and I 'd take it all in half-sovereigns—two millions of them, or three millions—and just untwist every coin, one by one, out from among their heart-strings. Oh—but it 'll be all right as it is. It 's enough to make a

man feel religious—to think how those thieves are going to suffer."

"Well," she said, slowly, after reflection, "it all rather frightens me."

As if the chill in the air of the cheerless room had suddenly accentuated itself, she arose, took a match-box from the mantel, and, stooping, lit the fire.

He looked down at the tall, black-clad figure, bent in stiff awkwardness over the smoking grate, and his eyes softened. Then he took fresh note of the room—the faded, threadbare carpet, the sparse old furniture that had seemed ugly to even his uninformed boyish taste, the dingy walls and begrimed low ceiling—all pathetic symbols of the bleak life to which she had been condemned.

"Frightens you?" he queried, with a kind of jovial tenderness, as she got to her feet; "frightens you, eh? Why, within a month's time, old lady, you 'll be riding in the Park in your own carriage, with niggers folding their arms up behind, and you 'll be taking it all as easy and as natural as if you 'd been born in a barouche."

He added, in response to the enquiry of her lifted brows: "Barouche? That 's what we 'd call in England a landau."

She stood with a foot upon the fender, her tired, passive face inclined meditatively, her rusty old black gown drawn back by one hand from the snapping sparks. "No," she said, slowly, joyless resignation mingling with pride in her voice. "I was born here over the shop."

"Well, good God! so was I," he commented, lustily. "But that 's no reason why I should n't wind up in Park Lane—or you either."

She had nothing to say to this, apparently. After a little, she seated herself again, drawing her chair closer to the hearth. "It 's years since I 've lit this fire before

the first of November," she remarked, with the air of defending the action to herself.

" Oh, we 're celebrating," he said, rubbing his hands over the reluctant blaze. " Everything goes, tonight ! "

Her face, as she looked up at him, betrayed the bewilderment of her mind. " You set out to tell me what it was all about," she reminded him. " You see I 'm completely in the dark. I only hear you say that you 've made a great fortune. That 's all I know. Or perhaps you 've told me as much as you care to."

" Why, not at all," he reassured her, pulling his own chair toward him with his foot, and sprawling into it with a grunt of relief. " If you 'll draw me a glass of that beer of yours, I 'll tell you all about it. It 's not a thing for everybody to know, not to be breathed to a human being, for that matter—but you 'll enjoy it, and it 'll be safe enough with you."

As she rose, and moved toward a door, he called merrily after her :

" No more beer when that keg runs dry, you know. Nothing but champagne ! "

CHAPTER III

THORPE took a long, thoughtful pull at the beer his sister brought him.

"Ah, I did n't know I was so thirsty," he said, when he put the glass down. "Truth is—I 've lost track of myself altogether since—since the big thing happened. I seem to be somebody else—a comparative stranger, so to speak. I 've got to get acquainted with myself, all over again. You can't imagine what an extraordinary feeling it is—this being hit every few minutes with the recollection that you 're worth half a million. It 's like being struck over the head. It knocks you down. There are such thousands of things to do—you dance about, all of a flutter. You don't know where to begin."

"Begin where you left off," suggested Louisa. "You were going to tell me how—how 'the big thing' happened. You 're always coming to it—and never getting any further."

Nodding comprehension of the rebuke's justification, he plunged forthwith into the tale.

"You remember my telling you at the time how I got my Board together. I 'm speaking now of the present Company—after I 'd decided to be my own promoter, and have at least some kind of 'a look-in' for my money. There was n't much money left, by the way ; it was considerably under three thousand. But I come to that later. First there was the Board. Here was where that Lord Mowden that I told you about—the man that came over

on the ship with me—came in. I went to him. I—God! I was desperate—but I had n't much of an idea he 'd consent. But he did! He listened to me, and I told him how I 'd been robbed, and how the Syndicate would have cut my throat if I had n't pulled away,—and he said, 'Why, yes, I 'll go on your Board.' Then I told him more about it, and presently he said he 'd get me another man of title—a sky-scraper of a title too—to be my Chairman. That 's the Marquis of Chaldon, a tremendous diplomatic swell, you know, Ambassador at Vienna in his time, and Lord Lieutenant and all sorts of things, but willing to gather in his five hundred a year, all the same."

"Do you mean that *you* pay *him* five hundred pounds a year?" asked the sister.

"Yes, I 've got a live Markiss who works for me at ten quid a week, and a few extras. The other Directors get three hundred. This Lord Plowden is one of them—but I 'll tell you more about him later on. Then there 's Watkin, he 's a small accountant Finsbury way; and Davidson, he 's a wine-merchant who used to belong to a big firm in Dundee, but gets along the best way he can on a very dicky business here in London, now. And then there 's General Kervick, awfully well-connected old chap, they say, but I guess he needs all he can get. He 's started wearing his fur-coat already. Well, that 's my Board. I could n't join it, of course, till after allotment—that 's because I 'm the vendor, as they call it—but that has n't interfered at all with my running the whole show. The Board does n't really count, you know. It only does what I want it to do. It 's just a form that costs me seventeen hundred a year, that 's all."

"Seventeen hundred a year," she repeated, mechanically.

"Well, then we got out the prospectus, d' ye see. Or

first, there were other things to be done. I saw that a good broker's name counted for a lot on a prospectus. I picked out one that I 'd heard was reasonable—it 'd been a splendid name if I could have got it—but he calmly said his price was two thousand pounds, all cash down—and I came away. Finally I got a fellow who had n't done much of anything yet, and so was n't so stiff about his figure. He agreed to take £500 cash, and 2,000 in shares. It was God's luck that I hit on him, for he turned out, at the pinch, to be the one man in a million for me. But I 'll tell you about him later. He 's the Broker, mind ; you must n't forget him. Well, then, he and I got a Solicitor—he took £200 cash, but he had to have 2,000 shares—and the firm of Auditors—they were £100 cash and 1,000 shares. Every company has to have these people pasted on to it, by law. Oh yes, and then you must have your Bankers. You don't pay them anything, though, thank God! Well, then, there was the machinery complete, all ready to start. I took a handsome set of offices, and furnished them up to the nines—but that I was able to do pretty well on credit. You see, ready money was getting short.

"And now came the biggest pull of all. There was the press to be worked."

He spoke as if there were no other papers in London but the financial journals.

"I didn't sleep much while that was being fixed up. You've got no more idea of what the press means, Louisa, than you have of—of a coil of snakes thawing out hungry in the spring. Why, if one blackmailer came to me, I swear a hundred did. They scared the life out of me, the first month or so. And then there's a swarm of advertising agents, who say they can keep these blackmailers off, if you 'll make it worth their while. But they all

wanted too much money for me—and for a while I was at my wits' ends. At last I got a fellow—he 's not behaved so badly, all things considered—who had some sporting blood in his veins, and he was willing to do the whole thing for £5,000, if I could pay £1,500 down, and the rest in shares. But that was just what I could n't do, you see, so finally he took £1,000 down and 5,000 in shares—and as I say he 's done it tolerably well. There was one editor that I had to square personally—that is to say, £100 cash—it had to be in sovereigns, for notes could be traced—and a call of 2,000 shares at par,—he 's the boss pirate that everybody has to square—and of course there were odd ten-pound notes here and there, but as a rule I just opened the door and fired the blackmailers out. The moment a fellow came in, and handed me his card, and said he had proofs of two kinds of articles in his pocket, one praising me, one damning me, I told him to go and see my advertising agent, and if he would n't do that, then to go to hell. That 's the way you 've got to talk in the City," he added, as if in apologetic explanation.

Louisa looked impassively at her brother. "Oh, I 've heard the expression as far west as the Strand," she remarked.

"Well, then came the issue. That was last Saturday. You saw the prospectus in Saturday morning's papers, and in the weeklies. The list was to be kept open, it said, till Wednesday morning—that was yesterday. That is to say, during all that time, people could apply for shares."

"Which they did n't do—according to your account," the sister suggested, dryly.

Thorpe passed his fingers through his roughened hair, and eyed her with a momentary quizzical gleam in his

eye. Then he became serious again. The recollection of what he was now to narrate brought a frown to his brows.

"On Tuesday afternoon," he began, with portentous deliberation—"Or no, first I must explain something. You see, in bringing out a company, you can't put up too stout a bluff. I mean, you 've got to behave as if you were rolling in wealth—as if everything was coming your way, and fortunes were to be made by fastening to you. I don't know that it often fools anybody very much, but it 's part of the game, and you must play it. Well, accordingly, my Broker goes on 'change Saturday morning, and has his jobber shout out that he 'll buy 'Rubber Consols'—that 's what our shares are called on the street—at an eighth premium ; that is to say, he offered to buy for twenty-two-and-six what we were offering to the public for twenty shillings. Of course, you see, the object of that was to create the impression that there was a regular God-almighty rush for our shares. As I say, I don't know whether that ever fooled anybody—but at least there was the chance that it might start up some dealing in the shares—and all those things help. Besides, you got the sales noticed in the papers, and that might start up applications from the public. Well, the Broker bought 1,000 shares this way on Saturday. On Monday, when it might still be possible to change the luck, he bought 3,500 more, still at that premium of an eighth. He bought some Tuesday morning too—say 4,000. Well, now, keep those figures in your head, and keep an eye on the Broker. He 's worth watching—as you 'll see."

"What 's his name?" asked the sister, with an accession of alertness in her face. "You call him 'Broker'—and that does n't mean anything to me. They 're all brokers, are n't they?"

"Semple—Colin Semple, that 's his name. He 's a young Scotchman—father 's a Presbyterian minister. He 's a little, insignificant runt of a chap to look at—but I learned a long time ago not to judge a singed cat by his looks. However—where was I?"

"You were going to tell about Tuesday afternoon, were n't you?"

He nodded gravely, and straightened himself, drawing a long breath in preparation for the dramatic recital before him. "On Tuesday afternoon," he began again, with impressive slowness, "I was walking on Throgmorton Street, about four o'clock. It was raining a little—it had been raining on and off all day—a miserable, rotten sort of a day, with greasy mud everywhere, and everybody poking umbrellas into you. I was out walking because I 'd 'a' cut my throat if I 'd tried to stay in the office another ten minutes. All that day I had n't eaten anything. I had n't slept worth speaking of for three nights. The whole game was up for me. I was worse than ruined. I had half a crown in my pocket. I had ten or twelve pounds in the bank—and they would n't let me overdraw a farthing. I tell you, I was just plumb busted.

"There came along in the gutter a sandwich-man. I 'd seen the cuss before during the day, walking up and down near my offices. I took notice of him, because he was the raggedest, dirtiest, most forlorn-looking cripple you ever saw in your life. Now I read what was on his boards. It was the bill of a paper that I had refused to be bled by, and there it was in big letters: 'The Rubber Bubble Burst!' 'Thorpe's Audacity Punished!' Those were the words. I can see them with my eyes shut. I stood there, looking at the fellow, and I suppose there was something in the way I looked, for he stopped too.

Of course, he did n't know me from Adam, but all the same, I 'm damned if he did n't wink his eye at me—as if we two had a joke between us. And at that I burst out laughing—I simply roared with laughter, like a boy at a pantomime—and I took that last half-crown out of my pocket, and I gave it to the sandwich-man. God ! you should have seen his face."

"I don't particularly mind, Joel," said his sister, "but I never heard you swear so much before."

"Oh, what the—what the deuce !" he protested, impatiently. "Don't interrupt me now ! Well, I went on down the street. The members of the Stock Exchange were coming out of 'the house,' and making up little groups on the pavement. They do business inside, you know, until closing time—this day it happened to be four o'clock—and then they come out and deal in the street with one another, with the kerb-stone mob, who are not allowed inside, standing round to watch the thing. I came along into the thick of these fellows ; they were yelling out all sorts of things—' East Rands,' ' Oroyas,' ' Lake View Centrals,' and what not, but these went in one ear and out the other. If there ever was a man with no stomach for the market it was me. But then someone roared out :

" ' At seven-eighths, sell Rubber Consols ! Sell five hundred Rubber at seven-eighths ! Sell five hundred at three-quarters ! At three-quarters you have 'em ! Rubber Consols ! Sell a thou. at three-quarters !'

"This thing went into my brain like a live coal. I stopped and looked up at the fellow—and by God, it was one of the men I 've been talking about—one of those Kaffir scoundrels. I wish I was better at remembering names—but I knew his face. There were some of the others around him, and they laughed at me, and he

"I MADE A JUMP AND RAN TO MEET SEMPLE."—*Page 35.*

laughed at me. Oh, they had a heap of fun out of me—for a minute or two. Pretty good fun, too! I guess they 'll remember it quite a while."

"Go on!" Louisa adjured him. The obvious proximity of the dramatic climax drew her forward in her chair, and brought a glow of expectation to her eyes.

"I got myself away from that crowd somehow—I think I was afraid if I stayed I 'd strangle the one who was shouting on the steps—and I went toward my office. But when I got to the door, I did n't have the courage to go in. I 'd furnished it better, I suppose, than any other office in Austin Friars, and I had a kind of feeling that the sight of those carpets, and oak-tables and desks, and brass-railings and so on would make me sick. I owed for 'em all, bear in mind——"

"But—Joel," the sister interposed. "One thing I don't understand. How many people had applied for shares? You have n't mentioned that."

A fleeting smile lighted up the saturnine gloom of his present mood. "It was hardly worth mentioning," he answered, with bitter mirth. "Between five and six thousand shares were subscribed, all told. I think the withdrawals by telegraph brought it down to practically five thousand. We offered a hundred thousand, you know.—But let me go on with my story. I stood there, in front of our street-door, in a kind of trance. The words of that Jew—'Sell Rubber Consols at three-quarters!'—buzzed inside my head as if they would burst it open. I turned—and I happened to see my Broker—the Scotchman, Semple, you know—coming along toward me. Right at that minute, like a flash, something dawned on me. In less than a second, I saw the whole damned rotten outfit turned upside down, with me on top. I made a jump, and ran to meet Semple.

"'How many shares of ours have you bought?' I asked him, with a grip tight on his arm.

"The little chap was looking mighty sick. He figured up in his mind. 'I 'm afraid it 's eight thousand five hundred, all told,' he said, in a sort of Presbyterian whimper.

"'Well—how would these gentlemen go about it to deliver their goods—that is, supposing we got a settlement?'

"I asked him this, and kept my eye on his face. He looked puzzled for a minute. Then he put out his lip. Then he shot me a glance as sharp as a razor, and we looked into one another's eyes.

"'They were shouting them out to me at three-quarters, a minute ago,' I told him.

"He was onto the game like lightning. 'Wait for me in the office,' he whispered. 'We 'll go nap on this!'

"With that he was off like a streak. He stopped running just before he got to the corner, though, and began walking slowly, sauntering along, you know, as if his mind was on nothing but second-hand books. I watched him out of sight—and then I went back, and up to the offices. The furniture did n't scare me a bit this time. Why, I stopped and felt of the brass-railing just outside the Board Room, and I said to myself—'Pshaw! We could have you of solid gold, if we wanted to.'"

He paused here, and regarded his sister with what she felt was intended to be a significant look. She shrank from the confession that its meaning was Greek to her. "Well—and what next?" she asked, guardedly.

"Semple came back in twenty minutes or so—and the next morning he was at it again—and what with him and his jobber, by George, on the quiet, they picked up nearly eighteen thousand of our shares. Some they paid fifteen

shillings for, some they got at twelve-and-six and even ten. That does n't matter ; it 's of no more importance than the coppers you give to crossing-sweepers. The thing was to get the shares—and by God we 've got them ! Twenty-six thousand two hundred shares, that 's what we 've got. Now, do you see what that means ? ''

" Why yes,'' she answered, with a faint-hearted assumption of confidence. " Of course, you know the property is so good that you 'll make a profit on the shares you 've bought far below their value. But I don't think I quite see——''

He interrupted her with an outburst of loud laughter. " Don't think you quite see ? '' he gurgled at her, with tears of pleasure in his eye. " Why, you dummy, you have n't got the faintest glimmer of a notion of what it 's all about. The value of the property 's got nothing in the world to do with it. That 's neither here nor there. If there was n't any such property in existence, it would be just the same.''

He had compassion upon her blank countenance, at this, and explained more gently : " Why, don't you see, Lou, it 's this way. This is what has happened. We 've got what 's called a corner on the bears. They 're caught short, and we can squeeze them to our hearts' content. What—you don't understand now ? Why, see here ! These fellows who 've sold twenty-six thousand of our shares—they have n't got them to sell, and they can't get them. That is the point—they can't get them for love nor money—they must pay me my own price for them, or be ruined men. The moment they realize the situation, they will begin offering a premium for Rubber Consols. The price of a one-pound share will be two pounds, then four—six—ten—twenty—thirty—whatever I want to drive it to.''

Louisa stared up at him with wide open eyes. It seemed to her that she understood now. It was very exciting.

"You see," he went on, taking approving note of the new light of comprehension in her glance, "we did something that Tuesday afternoon beside buy up these shares. Semple rushed off to his office, and he and his clerks got up a lot of dummy applications for shares, made out in all the different names they could be safe in using, and they put these into the bank with the application money—Semple found that—and next day he went and saw the advertising agent and the solicitor and the auditors—and got them to pool the shares that I 've promised to give them. A pool? That means they agree to transfer their shares to me as trustee, and let me deal with them as I like—of course to their advantage. In any case, their shares are vendor's shares, and could n't be dealt with in this transaction. So you see the thing is hermetically sealed. Nobody can get a share except from me, and at my price. But these fellows that have sold them—they 've *got* to have them, don't you see. They had their little temporary joke with me on the street that afternoon—and now they must walk up to the captain's office and settle. They 've got to pay me at least half a million pounds for that few minutes' fun of theirs. I may make it a good deal more; I don't know yet."

"Oh, Joel!" she groaned at him, in awed stupefaction. His rather languid indecision as to whether half a million was going to be enough, impressed her more powerfully than had any detail of his narrative.

In a few comprehensive sentences he finished up for her what there was to tell. "This afternoon my Board met to allot the shares. They saw the applications, amounting in all to over ninety thousand shares. It took their breath away—they had heard that things were going quite

the other way with us. They were so tickled that they asked no questions. The allotment went through like a greased pig. About 5,000 shares went to those who had actually applied for them, and 88,000 were solemnly given to the dummy applicants. Of course, there was n't a whisper about these dummies. Nobody winked so much as an eyelash. But I 've found since that one of the Directors—that Lord Plowden I told you about—was onto the thing all the while. But he 's all right. Everybody 's all right. Of course the dummies' shares still stand in their names—on paper—but in reality I 've got them all in my safe—in my pocket you might say. They are really mine, you understand. So now there 's nothing for us to do but to apply to the Stock Exchange for a special settlement date, and meanwhile lie quiet and watch the Jews stew in their own juice. Or fry in their own fat, eh? That 's better."

"But," she commented slowly, "you say there are no shares to be bought—and yet as I understand it, there are those five thousand that were sent out to the people who really applied."

"Bravo, Lou!" he answered her jovially. "You actually do understand the thing. You 've put your finger straight on the point. It is true that those shares are out against us—or might be turned against us if they could be bought up. But in reality, they don't count at all. In the first place, you see, they 're scattered about among small holders, country clergymen and old maids on an annuity and so on—all over the country. Even if these people were all traced, and hunted up, suppose it was worth the trouble and expense, they would n't sell. The bigger the price they were offered, the more mulish they would be about holding. That 's always the way with them. But even if they did all sell, their five thou-

sand would be a mere drop in the bucket. There would be over twenty thousand others to be accounted for. That would be quite enough for my purposes. Oh, I figured all that out very carefully. My own first notion was to have the dummies apply for the whole hundred thousand, and even a little over. Then, you see, we might have allotted everything to the dummies, and sent back the money and applications of the genuine ones. But that would have been rather hard to manage with the Board. The Markiss would have said that the returns ought to be made *pro rata*—that is, giving everybody a part of what they applied for—and that would have mixed everything up. And then, too, if anybody suspected anything, why the Stock Exchange Committee would refuse us a special settlement—and, of course, without that the whole transaction is moonshine. It was far too risky, and we did n't send back a penny."

"It 's all pretty risky, I should think," she declared as she rose. "I should think you 'd lie awake more than ever now—now that you 've built your hopes so high and it 'd be so awful to have them come to nothing."

He smilingly shook his head. "No, it can no more fail than that gas can fail to burn when you put a light to it. It 's all absolute. My half-million is as right as if it were lying to my credit in the Bank of England. Oh, that reminds me," he went on in a slightly altered tone—"it 's damned comical, but I 've got to ask you for a little money. I 've only got about seven pounds at my bank, and just at the minute it would give me away fearfully to let Semple know I was hard up. Of course he 'd let me have anything I wanted—but, you can see—I don't like to ask him just at the moment."

She hesitated visibly, and scanned his face with a wistful gaze. "You 're quite sure, Joel?"—she began—"and

you have n't told me—how long will it be before you come into some of this money ? ''

'' Well,''—he in turn paused over his words—'' well, I suppose that by next week things will be in such shape that my bank will see I 'm good for an overdraft. Oh heavens, yes ! there 'll be a hundred ways of touching some ready. But if you 've got twenty or thirty pounds handy just now—I tell you what I 'll do, Lou. I 'll give you a three months bill, paying one hundred pounds for every sovereign you let me have now. Come, old lady : you don't get such interest every day, I 'll bet.''

'' I don't want any interest from you, Joel,'' she replied, simply. '' If you 're sure I can have it back before Christmas, I think I can manage thirty pounds. It will do in the morning, I suppose ? ''

He nodded an amused affirmative. '' Why—you don't imagine, do you,'' he said, '' that all this gold is to rain down, and none of it hit you ? Interest ? Why of course you 'll get interest—and capital thrown in. What did you suppose ? ''

'' I don't ask anything for myself,'' she made answer, with a note of resolution in her voice. '' Of course if you like to do things for the children, it won't be me who 'll stand in their light. They 've been spoiled for my kind of life as it is.''

'' I 'll do things for everybody,'' he affirmed roundly. '' Let 's see—how old is Alfred ? ''

'' He 'll be twenty in May—and Julia is fourteen months older than he is.''

'' Gad ! '' was Thorpe's meditative comment. '' How they shoot up ! Why I was thinking she was a little girl.''

'' She never will be tall, I 'm afraid,'' said the literal mother. '' She favours her father's family. But Alfred is more of a Thorpe. I 'm sorry you missed seeing them

last summer—but of course they did n't stop long with me. This was no place for them—and they had a good many invitations to visit schoolfellows and friends in the country. Alfred reminds me very much of what you were at his age : he 's got the same good opinion of himself, too—and he 's not a bit fonder of hard work."

"There 's one mighty big difference between us, though," remarked Thorpe. "He won't start with his nose held down to the grindstone by an old father hard as nails. He 'll start like a gentleman—the nephew of a rich man."

"I 'm almost afraid to have such notions put in his head," she replied, with visible apprehension. "You must n't encourage him to build too high hopes, Joel. It 's speculation, you know—and anything might happen to you. And then—you may marry, and have sons of your own."

He lifted his brows swiftly—as if the thought were new to his mind. A slow smile stole into the little wrinkles about his eyes. He opened his lips as if to speak, and then closed them again.

"Well," he said at last, abruptly straightening himself, and casting an eye about for his coat and hat. "I 'll be round in the morning—on my way to the City. Good-bye till then."

CHAPTER IV

IN Charing Cross station, the next afternoon, Mr. Thorpe discovered by the big clock overhead that he had arrived fully ten minutes too soon. This deviation from his deeply-rooted habit of catching trains at the last possible moment did not take him by surprise. He smiled dryly, and nodded to the illuminated dial, as if they shared the secret of some quaint novelty. This getting to the station ahead of time was of a piece with what had been happening all day—merely one more token of the general upheaval in the routine of his life.

From early morning he had been acutely conscious of the feeling that his old manners and usages and methods of thought—the thousand familiar things that made up the Thorpe he had been—were becoming strange to him. They fitted him no longer; they began to fall away from him. Now, as he stood here on the bustling platform, it was as if they had all disappeared—been left somewhere behind him outside the station. With the two large bags which the porter was looking after—both of a quite disconcerting freshness of aspect—and the new overcoat and shining hat, he seemed to himself a new kind of being, embarked upon a voyage of discovery in the unknown.

Even his face was new. A sudden and irresistible impulse had led him to the barber-shop in his hotel at the outset; he could not wait till after breakfast to have his beard removed. The result, when he beheld it in the mirror, had not been altogether reassuring. The over-

long, thin, tawny moustasche which survived the razor assumed an undue prominence; the jaw and chin, revealed now for the first time in perhaps a dozen years, seemed of a sickly colour, and, in some inexplicable way, misshapen. Many times during the day, at his office, at the restaurant where he lunched, at various outfitters' shops which he had visited, he had pursued the task of getting reconciled to this novel visage in the looking-glass. The little mirrors in the hansom cabs had helped him most in this endeavour. Each returned to him an image so different from all the others—some cadaverous, some bloated, but each with a spontaneous distortion of its own—that it had become possible for him to strike an average tolerable to himself, and to believe in it.

His sister had recognized him upon the instant, when he entered the old book-shop to get the money promised overnight, but in the City his own clerks had not known him at first. There was in this an inspiring implication that he had not so much changed his appearance as revived his youth. The consciousness that he was in reality still a young man spread over his mind afresh, and this time he felt that it was effacing all earlier impressions. Why, when he thought of it, the delight he had had during the day in buying new shirts and handkerchiefs and embroidered braces, in looking over the various stocks of razors, toilet articles, studs and sleeve-links, and the like, and telling the gratified tradesmen to give him the best of everything—this delight had been distinctively boyish. He doubted, indeed, if any mere youth could have risen to the heights of tender satisfaction from which he reflected upon the contents of his portmanteaus. To apprehend their full value one must have been without them for such a weary time! He had this wonderful advantage—that he supplemented the fresh-hearted joy of

the youth in nice things, with the adult man's knowledge of how bald existence could be without them. It was worth having lived all those forty obscure and mostly unpleasant years, for this one privilege now of being able to appreciate to the uttermost the touch of double-silk underwear.

It was an undoubted pity that there had not been time to go to a good tailor. The suit he had on was right enough for ordinary purposes, and his evening-clothes were as good as new, but the thought of a costume for shooting harassed his mind. He had brought along with him, for this eventful visit, an old Mexican outfit of yellowish-grey cloth and leather, much the worse for rough wear, but saved from the disreputable by its suggestion of picturesque experiences in a strange and romantic country. At least it had seemed to him, in the morning, when he had packed it, to be secure in this salvation. Uneasy doubts on the subject had soon risen, however, and they had increased in volume and poignancy as his conceptions of a wardrobe expanded in the course of the day's investigations and purchases. He had reached the point now of hoping that it would rain bitterly on the morrow.

It was doubly important to keep a close look-out for Lord Plowden, since he did not know the name of the station they were to book for, and time was getting short. He dwelt with some annoyance upon his oversight in this matter, as his watchful glance ranged from one entrance to another. He would have liked to buy the tickets himself, and have everything in readiness on the arrival of his host. As it was, he could not even tell the porter how his luggage was to be labelled, and there was now less than two minutes! He moved forward briskly, with the thought of intercepting his friend at the front of the sta-

tion ; then halted, and went back, upon the recollection that while he was going out one way, Plowden might come in by the other. The seconds, as they passed now, became severally painful to his nerves. The ringing of a bell somewhere beyond the barrier provoked within him an impulse to tearful profanity.

Then suddenly everything was all right. A smooth-faced, civilly-spoken young man came up, touched his hat, and asked : " Will you kindly show me which is your luggage, sir ? "

Thorpe, even while wondering what business of his it was, indicated the glaringly new bags—and then only half repressed a cry of pleasure at discovering that Lord Plowden stood beside him.

" It's all right ; my man will look out for your things," said the latter, as they shook hands. " We will go and get our places."

The fat policeman at the gate touched his helmet. A lean, elderly man in a sort of guard's uniform hobbled obsequiously before them down the platform, opened to them a first-class compartment with a low bow and a deprecatory wave of the hand, and then impressively locked the door upon them. " The engine will be the other way, my Lord, after you leave Cannon Street," he remarked through the open window, with earnest deference. " Are there any of your bags that you want in the compartment with you ? "

Plowden had nodded to the first remark. He shook his head at the second. The elderly man at this, with still another bow, flapped out a green flag which he had been holding furled behind his back, and extended it at arm's length. The train began slowly to move. Mr. Thorpe reflected to himself that the peerage was by no means so played-out an institution as some people imagined.

"Ho-ho!" the younger man sighed a yawn, as he tossed his hat into the rack above his head. "We shall both be the better for some pure air. London quite does me up. And you—you 've been sticking at it months on end, have n't you? You look rather fagged—or at all events you did yesterday. You 've smartened yourself so—without your beard—that I can't say I 'd notice it to-day. But I take it every sensible person is glad to get away from London."

"Except for an odd Sunday, now and then, I have n't put my nose outside London since I landed here." Thorpe rose as he spoke, to deposit his hat also in the rack. He noted with a kind of chagrin that his companion's was an ordinary low black bowler. "I can tell you, I *shall* be glad of the change. I would have bought the tickets," he went on, giving words at random to the thought which he found fixed on the surface of his mind, "if I 'd only known what our station was."

Plowden waved his hand, and the gesture seemed to dismiss the subject. He took a cigar case from his pocket, and offered it to Thorpe.

"It was lucky, my not missing the train altogether," he said, as they lighted their cigars. "I was up late last night—turned out late this morning, been late all day, somehow—could n't catch up with the clock for the life of me. Your statement to me last night—you know it rather upset me."

The other smiled. "Well, I guess I know something about that feeling myself. Why, I 've been buzzing about today like a hen with her head cut off. But it 's fun, though, aint it, eh? Just to happen to remember every once in a while, you know, that it 's all true! But of course it means a thousand times more to me than it does to you."

The train had come to a stop inside the gloomy, domed cavern of Cannon Street. Many men in silk hats crowded to and fro on the platform, and a number of them shook the handle of the locked door. There was an effect of curses in the sound of their remarks which came through the closed window. Mr. Thorpe could not quite restrain the impulse to grin at them.

"Ah, that 's where you mistake," said Plowden, contemplating the mouthful of smoke he slowly blew forth. "My dear man, you can't imagine anybody to whom it would mean more than it does to me—I hope none of those fellows have a key. They 're an awful bore on this train. I almost never go by it, for that reason. Ah, thank God we 're off!—But as I was saying, this thing makes a greater difference to me than you can think of. I could n't sleep last night—I give you my word—the thing upset me so. I take it you—you have never had much money before ; that is, you know from experience what poverty is ? "

Thorpe nodded with eloquent gravity.

"Well—but you "—the other began, and then paused. "What I mean is," he resumed, "you were never, at any rate, responsible to anybody but yourself. If you had only a sovereign a day, or a sovereign a week, for that matter, you could accommodate yourself to the requirements of the situation. I don't mean that you would enjoy it any more than I should—but at least it was open to you to do it, without attracting much attention. But with me—placed in my ridiculous position—poverty has been the most unbearable torture one can imagine. You see, there is no way in which I can earn a penny. I had to leave the Army when I was twenty-three—the other fellows all had plenty of money to spend, and it was impossible for me to drag along with a title and an empty

pocket. I daresay that I ought to have stuck to it, because it is n't nearly so bad now, but twelve years ago it was too cruel for any youngster who had any pride about him—and, of course, my father having made rather a name in the Army, that made it so much harder for me. And after that, what was there? Of course, the bar and medicine and engineering and those things were out of the question, in those days at least. The Church?—that was more so still. I had a try at politics—but you need money there as much as anywhere else—money or big family connections. I voted in practically every division for four years, and I made the rottenest speeches you ever heard of at Primrose League meetings in small places, and after all that the best thing the whips could offer me was a billet in India at four hundred a year, and even that you took in depreciated rupees. When I tried to talk about something at home, they practically laughed in my face. I had no leverage upon them whatever. They did n't care in the least whether I came up and voted or stopped at home. Their majority was ten to one just the same—yes, twenty to one. So that door was shut in my face. I 've never been inside the House since—except once to show it to an American lady last summer—but when I do go again I rather fancy "—he stopped for an instant, and nodded his handsome head significantly—" I rather fancy I shall turn up on the other side."

" I 'm a Liberal myself, in English politics," interposed Thorpe.

Plowden seemed not to perceive the connection. They had left London Bridge behind, and he put his feet up on the cushions, and leant back comfortably. " Of course there was the City," he went on, speaking diagonally across to his companion, between leisurely intervals of absorption in his cigar. " There have been some directors'

fees, no doubt, and once or twice I 've come very near to what promised to be a big thing—but I never quite pulled it off. Really, without capital what can one do?—I 'm curious to know—did you bring much ready money with you to England?"

"Between six and seven thousand pounds."

"And if it 's a fair question—how much of it have you got left?"

Thorpe had some momentary doubts as to whether this was a fair question, but he smothered them under the smile with which he felt impelled to answer the twinkle in Plowden's eyes. "Oh, less than a hundred," he said, and laughed aloud.

Plowden also laughed. "By George, that 's fine!" he cried. "It 's splendid. There 's drama in it. I felt it was like that, you know. Something told me it was your last cartridge that rang the bell. It was that that made me come to you as I did—and tell you that you were a great man, and that I wanted to enlist under you. Ah, that kind of courage is so rare! When a man has it, he can stand the world on its head."

"But I was plumb scared, all the while, myself," Thorpe protested, genially. "Courage? I could feel it running out of my boots."

"Ah, yes, but that 's the great thing," insisted the other. "You did n't look as if you were frightened. From all one could see, your nerve was sublime. And nothing else matters—it was sublime."

"Curious—that thing happened to me once before," commented Thorpe, with ruminating slowness. "It was out on the plains, years ago, and I was in pretty hard luck, and was making my way alone from Tucson north, and some cowboys held me up, and were going to make kindling wood of me, they being under the impression

that I was a horse-thief they were looking after. There was five or six minutes there when my life was n't worth a last year's bird's-nest—and I tell you, sir, I was the scaredest man that ever drew the breath of life. And then something happened to be said that put the matter right—they saw I was the wrong man—and then—why then they could n't be polite enough to me. They half emptied their flasks down my throat, and they rode with me all the way to the next town, and there they wanted to buy everything liquid in the place for me. But what I was speaking of—do you know, those fellows got a tremendous notion of my nerve. It was n't so much that they told me so, but they told others about it. They really thought I was game to the core—when in reality, as I tell you, I was in the deadliest funk you ever heard of."

"That 's just it," said Plowden, "the part of you which was engaged in making mental notes of the occasion thought you were frightened ; we will say that it was itself frightened. But the other part of you, the part that was transacting business, so to speak—that was n't in the least alarmed. I fancy all born commanders are built like that. Did you ever see General Grant ?"

Thorpe shook his head.

"What reminded me of him—there is an account in his Memoirs of how he felt when he first was given a command, at the beginning of the Civil War. He was looking about for the enemy, who was known to be in the vicinity, and the nearer he got to where this enemy probably was, the more he got timid and unnerved, he says, until it seemed as if cowardice were getting complete mastery of him. And then suddenly it occurred to him that very likely the enemy was just as afraid of him as he was of the enemy, and that moment his bravery all re-

turned to him. He went in and gave the other man a terrible thrashing. It does n't apply to your case, particularly—but I fancy that all really brave men have those inner convictions of weakness, even while they are behaving like lions. Those must have been extraordinarily interesting experiences of yours—on the plains. I wish I could have seen something of that part of America when I was there last year. Unfortunately, it did n't come my way."

"I thought I remembered your saying you 'd been West."

Plowden smiled. "I 'm afraid I did think it was West at the time. But since my return I 've been warned that I must n't call Chicago West. That was as far as I went. I had some business there, or thought I had. When my father died, that was in 1884, we found among his papers a lot of bonds of some corporation purporting to be chartered by the State of Illinois. Our solicitors wrote several letters, but they could find out nothing about them, and there the matter rested. Finally, last year, when I decided to make the trip, I recollected these old bonds, and took them with me. I thought they might at least pay my expenses. But it was n't the least good. Nobody knew anything about them. It seems they related to something that was burned up in the Great Fire —either that, or had disappeared before that time. That fire seems to have operated like the Deluge—it cancelled everything that had happened previously. My unhappy father had a genius for that kind of investment. I shall have great pleasure in showing you tomorrow, a very picturesque and comprehensive collection of Confederate Bonds. Their face value is, as I remember it, eighty thousand dollars—that is, sixteen thousand pounds. I would entertain with joy an offer of sixteen shillings for

the lot. My dear father bought them—I should not be surprised to learn that he bought them at a premium. If they ever touched a premium for a day, that is certainly the day that he would have hit upon to buy. Oh, it was too rare! Too inspired! He left nearly a hundred thousand pounds' worth of paper—that is, on its face—upon which the solicitors realized, I think it was thirteen hundred pounds. It 's hard to imagine how he got them—but there were actually bonds among them issued by Kossuth's Hungarian Republic in 1848. Well—now you can see the kind of inheritance I came into, and I have a brother and sister more or less to look after, too."

Thorpe had been listening to these details with an almost exaggerated expression of sympathy upon his face. The voice in which he spoke now betrayed, however, a certain note of incredulity.

"Yes, I see that well enough," he remarked. "But what I don't perhaps quite understand—well, this is it. You have this place of yours in the country, and preserve game and so on—but of course I see what you mean. It 's what you 've been saying. What another man would think a comfortable living, is poverty to a man in your position."

"Oh, the place," said Plowden. "It is n't mine at all. I could never have kept it up. It belongs to my mother. It was her father's place; it has been in their family for hundreds of years. Her father, I daresay you know, was the last Earl of Hever. The title died with him. He left three daughters, who inherited his estates, and my mother, being the eldest, got the Kentish properties. Of course Hadlow House will come to me eventually, but it is hers during her lifetime. I may speak of it as my place, but that is merely a *façon de parler*: it is n't necessary to explain to everybody that it 's my mother's. It 's

my home, and that 's enough. It 's a dear old place. I can't tell you how glad I am that you 're going to see it."

" I 'm very glad, too," said the other, with unaffected sincerity.

" All the ambitions I have in the world," the nobleman went on, sitting upright now, and speaking with a confidential seriousness, " centre round Hadlow. That is the part of me that I 'm keen about. The Plowdens are things of yesterday. My grandfather, the Chancellor, began in a very small way, and was never anything more than a clever lawyer, with a loud voice and a hard heart, and a talent for money-making and politics. He got a peerage and he left a fortune. My father, for all he was a soldier, had a mild voice and a soft heart. He gave a certain military distinction to the peerage, but he played hell-and-tommy with the fortune. And then I come : I can't be either a Chancellor or a General, and I have n't a penny to bless myself with. You can't think of a more idiotic box for a man to be in. But now—thanks to you —there comes this prospect of an immense change. If I have money at my back—at once everything is different with me. People will remember then promptly enough that I am a Hadlow, as well as a Plowden. I will make the party whips remember it, too. It won't be a Secretary's billet in India at four hundred a year that they 'll offer me, but a Governorship at six thousand—that is, if I wish to leave England at all. And we 'll see which set of whips are to have the honour of offering me anything. But all that is in the air. It 's enough, for the moment, to realize that things have really come my way. And about that—about the success of the affair—I suppose there can be no question whatever ? "

" Not the slightest," Thorpe assured him. " Rubber Consols can go up to any figure we choose to name."

Lord Plowden proffered the cigar case again, and once more helped himself after he had given his companion a light. Then he threw himself back against the cushions, with a long sigh of content. "I 'm not going to say another word about myself," he announced, pleasantly. "I 've had more than my legitimate innings. You must n't think that I forget for a moment the reverse of the medal. You 're doing wonderful things for me. I only wish it were clearer to me what the wonderful things are that I can do for you."

"Oh, that 'll be all right," said the other, rather vaguely.

"Perhaps it 's a little early for you to have mapped out in your mind just what you want to do," Plowden reflected aloud. "Of course it has come suddenly upon you—just as it has upon me. There are things in plenty that we 've dreamed of doing, while the power to do them was a long way off. It does n't at all follow that these are the things we shall proceed to do, when the power is actually in our hands. But have you any plans at all? Do you fancy going into Parliament, for example?"

"Yes," answered Thorpe, meditatively. "I think I should like to go into Parliament. But that would be some way ahead. I guess I 've got my plans worked out a trifle more than you think. They may not be very definite, as regards details, but their main direction I know well enough. I 'm going to be an English country gentleman."

Lord Plowden visibly winced a little at this announcement. He seemed annoyed at the consciousness that he had done so, turning abruptly first to stare out of the window, then shifting his position on the seat, and at last stealing an uneasy glance toward his companion. Ap-

parently his tongue was at a loss for an appropriate comment.

Thorpe had lost none of these unwilling tokens of embarrassment. Plowden saw that at once, but it relieved even more than it surprised him to see also that Thorpe appeared not to mind. The older man, indeed, smiled in good-natured if somewhat ironical comprehension of the dumb-show.

"Oh, that 'll be all right, too," he said, with the evident intention of reassurance. "I can do it right enough, so far as the big things are concerned. It 'll be in the little things that I 'll want some steering."

"I 've already told you—you may command me to the utmost of my power," the other declared. Upon reflection, he was disposed to be ashamed of himself. His nerves and facial muscles had been guilty of an unpardonable lapse into snobbishness—and toward a man, too, who had been capable of behaviour more distinguished in its courtesy and generosity than any he had encountered in all the "upper circles" put together. He recalled all at once, moreover, that Thorpe's "h's" were perfect—and, for some occult reason, this completed his confusion.

"My dear fellow"—he began again, confronting with verbal awkwardness the other's quizzical smile—"don't think I doubt anything about you. I know well enough that you can do anything—be anything—you like."

Thorpe laughed softly.

"I don't think you know, though, that I 'm a public-school man," he said.

Plowden lifted his brows in unfeigned surprise. "No—I did n't know that," he admitted, frankly.

"Yes, I 'm a Paul's Pigeon," Thorpe went on, "as they called them in my day. That 's gone out now, I 'm told, since they 've moved to the big buildings in Ham-

mersmith. I did very well at school, too ; came out in the first fourteen. But my father would n't carry the thing any further. He insisted on my going into the shop when I left St. Paul's and learning the book-business. He had precisely the same kind of dynastic idea, you know, that you fellows have. His father and his grandfather had been booksellers, and he was going to hand on the tradition to me, and my son after me. That was his idea. And he thought that Paul's would help this—but that Oxford would kill it.

" Of course, he was right there—but he was wrong in supposing there was a bookseller in me. I liked the books well enough, mind you—but damn the people that came to buy them, I could n't stand it. You stood two hours watching to see that men did n't put volumes in their pockets, and at the end of that time you 'd made a profit of ninepence. While you were doing up the parcel, some fellow walked off with a book worth eighteen-pence. It was too slow for me. I did n't hit it off with the old man, either. We did n't precisely quarrel, but I went off on my own hook. I hung about London for some years, trying this thing and that. Once I started a book-shop of my own—but I did no good here. Finally I turned it up altogether, and went to Australia. That was in 1882. I 've been in almost every quarter of the globe since; I 've known what it was to be shipwrecked in a monsoon, and I 've lain down in a desert not expecting to get up again, with my belt tightened to its last hole for hunger—but I can't remember that I ever wished myself back in my father's book-shop."

Plowden's fine eyes sparkled his appreciation of the other's mood. He was silent for a moment, then lifted his head as if something had occurred to him. " You were speaking of the plan that you should succeed to your

father's business—and your son after you—you 're not married, are you ? ''

Thorpe slowly shook his head.

'' Our station is the next,'' said the younger man. '' It 's a drive of something under two miles. You 'd better light another cigar.'' He added, as if upon a casual afterthought : '' We can both of us think of marrying now.''

CHAPTER V

FOR the next two hours, Thorpe's thoughts were almost wholly occupied with various phases of the large subject of domestic service. He seemed suddenly to have been transported to some region populated exclusively by clean-shaven men in brown livery. One of these was holding a spirited horse outside the station, and when Lord Plowden had taken the reins, and Thorpe had gathered the rugs about his knees and feet, this menial silently associated himself with the young man who had accompanied them from town, on the back seat of the trap. With these people so close behind him, Thorpe felt that any intimate conversation was out of the question. Indeed, talk of any sort was not invited; the big horse burst forth with high, sprawling strides upon a career through the twilight, once the main road was reached, which it taxed all Plowden's energies to regulate. He kept up a continual murmuring monologue to the animal —"So—so—quiet, my pet,—so—so—easy, my beauty—so —so" — and his wrists and gloved hands were visibly under a tremendous tension of strain, as they held their own against the rigid arched neck and mouth of steel. Thorpe kept a grip on the side of the trap, and had only a modified pleasure in the drive. The road along which they sped seemed, in the gathering dusk, uncomfortably narrow, and he speculated a good deal as to how frightened the two mutes behind him must be. But silence was such a law of their life that, though he strained his ears, he could not so much as hear them sigh or gasp

It seemed but a very few minutes before they turned off, with but the most fleeting diminution of pace, upon a private road, which speedily developed into an avenue of trees, quite dark and apparently narrower than ever. Down this they raced precipitately, and then, coming out all at once upon an open space, swung smartly round the crescent of a gravel road, and halted before what seemed to be the door of a greenhouse. Thorpe, as he stood up in the trap, got an uncertain, general idea of a low, pale-coloured mansion in the background, with lights showing behind curtains in several widely separated windows; what he had taken to be a conservatory revealed itself now to be a glass gallery, built along the front of the central portion of this house.

A profusion of hospitable lights—tall wax-candles in brackets among the vines against the trellised wall—gave to this outlying entrance what the stranger felt to be a delightful effect. Its smooth tiled floor, comfortably bestrewn with rugs, was on a level with the path outside. There were low easy-chairs here, and a little wicker table bearing books and a lady's work-basket. Further on, giant chrysanthemum blooms were massed beneath the clusters of pale plumbago-flowers on the trellis. Directly in front, across the dozen feet of this glazed vestibule, the broad doorway of the house proper stood open—with warm lights glowing richly upon dark woods in the luxurious obscurity within.

What Thorpe noted most of all, however, was the servants who seemed to swarm everywhere. The two who had alighted from the trap had contrived somehow mysteriously to multiply themselves in the darkness. All at once there were a number of young men—at the horse's head, at the back and sides of the trap, at the first doorway, and the second, and beyond—each presenting such

a smooth-faced, pallid, brown-clad replica of all the others that Thorpe knew he should never be able to tell them apart.

Lord Plowden paused for a moment under the candle-light to look at his watch. "We did it in a bit over eight minutes," he remarked, with obvious satisfaction. "With four people and heavy roads that 's not so bad—not so bad. But come inside."

They moved forward through the wide doorway into an apartment the like of which Thorpe had not seen before. It was a large, square room, with a big staircase at the end, which separated and went off to right and left, half-way up its visible course. Its floor was of inlaid woods, old and uneven from long use, and carpeted here and there by the skins of tigers and leopards. There were many other suggestions of the chase about the room: riding boots, whips, spurs, and some stands of archaic weapons caught the eye at various points; the heads of foxes and deer peeped out on the blackened panels of the walls, from among clusters of hooks crowded with coats, hats, and mackintoshes. At the right, where a fire glowed and blazed under a huge open chimney-place, there were low chairs and divans drawn up to mark off a space for orderly domestic occupation. The irregularity of everything outside—the great table in the centre of the hall strewn with an incongruous litter of caps, books, flasks, newspapers, gloves, tobacco-pouches; the shoes, slippers, and leggings scattered under the benches at the sides—all this self-renewing disorder of a careless household struck Thorpe with a profound surprise. It was like nothing so much as a Mexican ranch—and to find it in the ancestral home of an English nobleman, filled to overflowing with servants, amazed him.

The glances that he cast about him, however, were im-

passive enough. His mind was charged with the ceaseless responsibility of being astonished at nothing. A man took his hat, and helped him off with his coat. Another moved toward the staircase with his two bags.

"If you will follow Pangbourn," said his host, indicating this second domestic, "he will look after you. You would like to go up and change now, would n't you? There 's a fire in your room."

Thus dismissed, he went up the stairs in the wake of his portmanteaus, taking the turning to the left, and then proceeding by a long, low passage, round more than one corner, to what he conceived to be a wing of the house. The servant ushered him into a room—and, in despite of himself, he sighed with pleasure at the sight of it. The prettiest and most charming of rooms it seemed to him to be—spacious and quaintly rambling in shape, with a delicately-figured chintz repeating the dainty effects of the walls upon the curtains and carpet and bed-hangings and chair-covers, and with a bright fire in the grate throwing its warm, cozy glow over everything. He looked at the pictures on the walls, at the photographs and little ornaments on the writing desk, and the high posts and silken coverlet of the big bed, and, secure in the averted face of the servant, smiled richly to himself.

This servant, kneeling, had unstrapped and opened the new bags. Thorpe looked to see him quit the room, this task accomplished, and was conscious of something like dismay at the discovery that he intended to unpack them as well. Pangbourn began gravely to unwrap one paper parcel after another and to assort their contents in little heaps on the sofa beside him. He did it deftly, imperturbably, as if all the gentlemen he had ever seen carried their belongings in packages done up by tradesmen.

Thorpe's impulse to bid him desist framed itself in words on the tip of his tongue—but he did not utter these words. After circling idly, hands in pockets, about the man and the bags for a little time, he invented something which it seemed better for him to say.

"I don't know what you 'll be able to make of those things," he remarked, casually. "My man has been buying them today—and I don't know what he may n't have forgotten. My whole outfit of that sort of thing went astray or was stolen at some station or other—the first part of the week—I think it must have been Leeds."

"Yes, sir," said Pangbourn, without emotion. "They 're very careless, sir."

He went on impassively, shaking out the black garments and spreading them on the bed, laying out a shirt and tie beside them, and arranging the razors, strop, and brushes on the dressing-table. He seemed to foresee everything—for there was not an instant's hesitation in the clock-like assiduity of his movements, as he bestowed handkerchiefs, in one drawer, socks in another, hung pyjamas before the fire, and set the patent-leather pumps against the fender. Even the old Mexican shooting-suit seemed in no way to disconcert him. He drew forth its constituent elements as with a practised hand; when he had hung them up, sombrero and all, in the wardrobe against the wall, they had the trick of making that venerable oaken receptacle look as if it had been fashioned expressly for them.

Thorpe's earlier uneasiness quite lost itself in his admiration for Pangbourn's resourceful dexterity. The delighted thought that now he would be needing a man like this for himself crossed his mind. Conceivably he might even get this identical Pangbourn—treasure though he were. Money could command everything on this broad

globe—and why not Pangbourn? He tentatively felt of the coins in his pocket, as it became apparent that the man's task was nearing completion—and then frowned at himself for forgetting that these things were always reserved for the end of a visit.

"Will you dress now, sir?" asked Pangbourn. His soft, distinct enunciation conveyed the suggestion of centuries of training.

"Eh?" said Thorpe, finding himself for the moment behind the other's thought.

"Shall you require me any further, sir?" the man reframed the question, deferentially.

"Oh! Oh—no," replied Thorpe. "No—I 'll get along all right."

Left to himself, he began hurriedly the task of shaving and dressing. The candles on either side of the thick, bevelled swinging mirror presented a somewhat embarrassing contrast to the electric light he was used to—but upon second thought he preferred this restrained aristocratic glimmer.

He had completed his toilet, and was standing at the bay-window, with his shoulder holding back the edge of the curtain, looking out upon the darkened lawn and wondering whether he ought to go downstairs or wait for someone to summon him, when he heard a knock at his door. Before he could answer, the door opened, and he made out in the candle- and firelight that it was Lord Plowden who had come in. He stepped forward to meet his host who, clad now in evening-clothes, was smoking a cigarette.

"Have they looked after you all right?" said Plowden, nonchalantly. "Have a cigarette before we go down? Light it by the candle. They never will keep matches in a bedroom."

He seated himself in an easy-chair before the fire, as he spoke, and stretched out his shining slippers toward the grate. "I thought I 'd tell you before we went down" —he went on, as Thorpe, with an elbow on the mantel, looked down at his handsome head—"my sister has a couple of ladies visiting her. One of them I think you know. Do you remember on shipboard a Miss Madden—an American, you know—very tall and fine, with bright red hair—rather remarkable hair it was?"

"I remember the lady," said Thorpe, upon reflection, "but we did n't meet." He could not wholly divest his tone of the hint that in those days it by no means followed that because he saw ladies it was open to him to know them.

Lord Plowden smiled a little. "Oh, you 'll like her. She 's great fun—if she 's in the mood. My mother and sister—I had them call on her in London last spring—and they took a great fancy to her. She 's got no end of money, you know—at least a million and a half—dollars, unfortunately. Her parents were Irish—her father made his pile in the waggon business, I believe—but she 's as American as if they 'd crossed over in—what was it, the 'Sunflower'? —no, the 'Mayflower.' Marvelous country for assimilation, that America is! You remember what I told you—it 's put such a mark on you that I should never have dreamt you were English."

Thorpe observed his companion, through a blue haze of smoke, in silence. This insistence upon the un-English nature of the effect he produced was not altogether grateful to his ears.

"The other one," continued Plowden, "is Lady Cressage. You 'll be interested in her—because a few years ago she was supposed to be the most beautiful woman in London. She married a shocking bounder—he would

have been Duke of Glastonbury, though, it he had lived —but he was drowned, and she was left poor as a church mouse. Oh ! by the way ! " he started up, with a gleam of aroused interest on his face—" it did n't in the least occur to me. Why, she 's a daughter of our General Kervick. How did he get on the Board, by the way ? Where did you pick him up ? "

Thorpe bent his brows in puzzled lines. " Why, you introduced me to him yourself, did n't you ? " he asked, slowly.

Plowden seemed unaffectedly surprised at the suggestion, as he turned it over in his mind. " By George ! I think you 're right," he said. " I 'd quite forgotten it. Of course I did. Let me see—oh yes, I reconstruct it readily enough now. Poor old chappie—he needs all he can get. He was bothering her about money—that was it, I remember now—but what an idiot I was to forget it. But what I was saying—there 's no one else but my mother and sister, and my brother Balder. He 's a youngster—twenty or thereabouts—and he purports to be reading for his exams for the Army. If they opened his head, though, I doubt if they 'd find anything but cricket and football, unless it might be a bit of golf. Well—that 's the party. I thought you might like to have a notion of them in advance. If you 've finished your cigarette "—he threw his own into the grate, and rose as he spoke—" we may as well be moving along. By the way," he concluded, as they walked toward the door, " I 've an idea that we won't say anything, just at the moment, about our great coup. I should like to keep it as a little surprise—for my mother and sister, you know."

Some two hours later, Thorpe found the leisure and the restored equanimity needful for a dispassionate survey of

his surroundings. He had become temporarily detached from the group over by the fireplace in the big drawing-room and was for the first time that evening very much at his ease. It was all much simpler, upon experiment, than he had feared. He stood now in a corner of the ornate apartment, whither he had wandered in examining the pictures on the walls, and contemplated with serenity the five people whom he had left behind him. He was conscious of the conviction that when he rejoined them, it would be on a new footing of assured equality. He knew now the exact measure of everything.

The Hon. Balder Plowden—a tall, heavily-built youth, with enormous shoulders and thick, hard hands, and pale straw-coloured hair and brows and eyelashes — had amiably sauntered beside him, and was elucidating for his benefit now, in slow, halting undertones, some unfathomable mystery connected with the varying attitude of two distinct breeds of terriers toward rats. Across the room, just within reach of the flickering ruddy firelight from the hearth, the American guest, Miss Madden, was seated at the piano, playing some low and rather doleful music. Thorpe bent his head, and assumed an air of attention, but in truth he listened to neither the Honourable Balder nor the piano. His thoughts were concentrated jealously upon his own position in this novel setting. He said to himself that it was all right.

Old Lady Plowden had seemed to like him from the start. The genial, if somewhat abstracted, motherliness of her welcome had been, indeed, his sheet anchor throughout the evening. She had not once failed to nod her head and smile and twinkle her little kind eyes through their spectacles at him, whenever by word or look he had addressed her. Nor did his original half-suspicion, that this was her manner to people in general, justify itself

upon observation. She was civil, even excessively civil, to the other two guests, but these ladies did not get the same eager and intent smile that he could command. He reasoned it out that Plowden must have said something pleasant to his mother about him—perhaps even to the point of explaining that he was to be the architect of their fortunes—but he did not like to ascribe all her hospitable warmth to that. It was dear to him to believe that she liked him on his own merits—and he did believe it, as his softened glance rested upon her where she sat almost facing him in her padded, wicker chair—small, white-haired, rosy-cheeked, her intelligent face radiating a kind of alert placidity which somehow made him feel at home.

He had not been as much at home with the others. The Honourable Balder, of course, did n't count ; nobody paid attention to him, and least of all a busy Rubber King. He gave not much more heed to the American—the tall young woman with the red hair and the million and a half of dollars. She was plainly a visitor like himself, not at all identified with the inner life of the household. He fancied, moreover, that she in no way desired to be thus identified. She seemed to carry herself with a deliberate aloofness underlying her surface amiability. When he had spoken his few words with her, once or twice, he had got this effect of stony reserve close beneath her smile and smooth words. True, this might mean only that she felt herself out of her element, just as he did—but to him, really it did not matter what she felt. A year ago—why, yes, even a fortnight ago—the golden rumour of millions would have shone round her auburn hair in his eyes like a halo. But all that was changed. Calculated in a solidified currency, her reported fortune shrank to a mere three hundred thousand pounds. It was a re-

spectable sum for a woman to have, no doubt, but it did nothing to quicken the cool indifference with which he considered her.

The two other young women were different. They were seated together on a sofa, so placed as regarded his point of view, that he saw only in part the shadowed profiles of the faces they turned toward the piano. Although it was not visible to him, the posture of their shoulders told him that they were listening to the music each holding the other's hand. This tacit embrace was typical in his mind of the way they hung together, these two young women. It had been forced upon his perceptions all the evening, that this fair-haired, beautiful, rather stately Lady Cressage, and the small, swarthy, round-shouldered daughter of the house, peering through her pince-nez from under unduly thick black brows, formed a party of their own. Their politeness toward him had been as identical in all its little shades of distance and reservation as if they had been governed from a single brain-centre. It would be unfair to them to assume from their manner that they disliked him, or were even unfavourably impressed by him. The finesse of that manner was far too delicate a thing to call into use such rough characterizations. It was rather their action as a unit which piqued his interest. He thought he could see that they united upon a common demeanour toward the American girl, although of course they knew her much better than they knew him. It was not even clear to him that there were not traces of this combination in their tone toward Plowden and the Honourable Balder. The bond between them had twisted in it strands of social exclusiveness, and strands of sex sympathy.

He did not analyze all this with much closeness in his thoughts, but the impressions of it were distinct enough

to him. He rather enjoyed these impressions than otherwise. Women had not often interested him consecutively to any large degree, either in detail or as a whole. He had formulated, among other loose general notions of them, however, the idea that their failure to stand by one another was one of their gravest weaknesses. This proposition rose suddenly now in his mind, and claimed his attention. It became apparent to him, all at once, that his opinions about women would be henceforth invested with a new importance. He had scarcely before in his life worn evening dress in a domestic circle which included ladies—certainly never in the presence of such certificated and hall-marked ladies as these. His future, however, was to be filled with experiences of this nature. Already, after this briefest of ventures into the new life, he found fresh conceptions of the great subject springing up in his thoughts. In this matter of women sticking together, for example—here before his eyes was one of the prettiest instances of it imaginable. As he looked again at the two figures on the sofa, so markedly unlike in outward aspect, yet knit to each other in such a sisterly bond, he found the spectacle really touching.

Lady Cressage had inclined her classic profile even more toward the piano. Thorpe was not stirred at all by the music, but the spirit of it as it was reflected upon this beautiful facial outline—sensitive, high-spirited, somewhat sad withal—appealed to something in him. He moved forward cautiously, noiselessly, a dozen restricted paces, and halted again at the corner of a table. It was a relief that the Honourable Balder, though he followed along, respected now his obvious wish for silence. But neither Balder nor anyone else could guess that the music said less than nothing to his ears—that it was the face that had beckoned him to advance.

Covertly, with momentary assurances that no one observed him, he studied this face and mused upon it. The white candle-light on the shining wall beyond threw everything into a soft, uniform shadow, this side of the thread of dark tracery which outlined forehead and nose and lips and chin. It seemed to him that the eyes were closed, as in reverie ; he could not be sure.

So she would have been a Duchess if her husband had lived ! He said to himself that he had never seen before, or imagined, a face which belonged so indubitably beneath a tiara of strawberry leaves in diamonds. The pride and grace and composure, yes, and melancholy, of the great lady—they were all there in their supreme expression. And yet—why, she was no great lady at all. She was the daughter of his old General Kervick—the necessitous and haughtily-humble old military gentleman, with the grey moustache and the premature fur coat, who did what he was told on the Board without a question, for a pitiful three hundred a year. Yes—she was his daughter, and she also was poor. Plowden had said so.

Why had Plowden, by the way, been so keen about relieving her from her father's importunities ? He must have had it very much at heart, to have invented the roundabout plan of getting the old gentleman a directorship. But no—there was nothing in that. Why, Plowden had even forgotten that it was he who suggested Kervick's name. It would have been his sister, of course, who was evidently such chums with Lady Cressage, who gave him the hint to help the General to something if he could. And when you came to think of it, these aristocrats and military men and so on, had no other notion of making money save by directorships. Clearly, that was the way of it. Plowden had remembered Kervick's name, when the chance arose to give the old boy a leg up, and then

had clean forgotten the circumstance. The episode rather increased his liking for Plowden.

He glanced briefly, under the impulse of his thought, to where the peer sat, or rather sprawled, in a big low chair before the fire. He was so nearly recumbent in it, indeed, that there was nothing to be seen of him but an elbow, and two very trim legs extended to the brass fender. Thorpe's gaze reverted automatically to the face of General Kervick's daughter. He wondered if she knew about the Company, and about him, and about his ability to solidify to any extent her father's financial position. Even more, upon reflection, he wondered whether she was very fond of her father ; would she be extremely grateful to one who should render him securely comfortable for life ?

Miss Madden rose from the piano before Thorpe noted that the music had ceased. There came from the others a soft but fervent chorus of exclamations, the sincerity and enthusiasm of which made him a little ashamed. He had evidently been deaf to something that deeply moved the rest. Even Balder made remarks which seemed to be regarded as apposite.

"What *is* it?" asked Lady Cressage, with obvious feeling. "I don't know when anything has touched me so much."

"Old Danish songs that I picked up on the *quai* in Paris for a franc or two," replied Miss Madden. "I arranged and harmonized them—and, oddly enough, the result is rather Keltic, don't you think ?"

"We are all of us Kelts in our welcome to music—and musicians—like this," affirmed Lord Plowden, who had scrambled to his feet.

With sudden resolution, Thorpe moved forward and joined the conversation.

CHAPTER VI

THORPE'S life-long habit of early rising brought him downstairs next morning before anybody else in the house, apparently, was astir. At all events, he saw no one in either the hall or the glass vestibule, as he wandered about. Both doors were wide open, however, to the mild, damp morning air. He found on one of the racks a cap that was less uncomfortable than the others, and sauntered forth to look about him.

His nerves were by no means in so serene a state as his reason told him they ought to be. The disquieting impression of bad dreams hung about him. The waking hour—always an evil time for him in these latter days of anxiety—had been this morning a peculiarly depressing affair. It had seemed to him, in the first minutes of reviving consciousness, that he was a hopelessly ruined and discredited man; the illusion of disaster had been, indeed, so complete and vivid that, even now, more than an hour later, he had not shaken off its effects.

He applied his mental energies, as he strolled along the gravel paths, to the task of reassuring himself. There were still elements of chance in the game, of course, but it was easy enough, here in the daylight, to demonstrate that they had been cut down to a minimum—that it was nonsense to borrow trouble about them. He reviewed the situation in painstaking detail, and at every point it was all right, or as nearly all right as any human business could be. He scolded himself sharply for this foolish

susceptibility to the intimidation of nightmares. "Look at Plowden!" he bade his dolorous spirit. "See how easy he takes things."

It was undeniable that Lord Plowden took things very easily indeed. He had talked with eloquence and feeling about the miseries and humiliations of a peerage inadequately endowed with money, but no traces of his sufferings were visible to Thorpe's observant eye. The nobleman himself looked the very image of contented prosperity—handsome, buoyant, light-hearted, and, withal, the best-groomed man in London. And this ancestral home of his—or of his mother's, since he seemed to insist upon the distinction—where were its signs of a stinted income? The place was overrun with servants. There was a horse which covered a distance of something like two miles in eight minutes. Inside and out, Hadlow House suggested nothing but assured plenty. Yet its master told the most unvarying tales of poverty, and no doubt they were in one sense true. What he wished to fix his mind upon, and to draw strength for himself from, was the gay courage with which these Plowdens behaved as if they were rich.

The grounds at the front of the house, hemmed in by high hedges and trees from what seemed to be a public road beyond, were fairly spacious, but the sleek decorum of their arrangement, while it pleased him, was scarcely interesting. He liked better to study the house itself, which in the daylight revealed itself as his ideal of what a historic English country-house of the minor class should be.

There had been a period in his youth when architecture had attracted him greatly as offering a congenial and lucrative career. Not much remained to him now of the classifications and phraseology which he had gone to the

trouble of memorizing, in that far-off time, but he still looked at buildings with a kind of professional consciousness. Hadlow House said intelligible things to him, and he was pleased with himself for understanding them. It was not new in any part, apparently, but there was nothing pretentious in its antiquity. It had never been a castle, or a fortified residence. No violent alteration in habits or needs distinguished its present occupants from its original builders. It had been planned and reared as a home for gentle people, at some not-too-remote date when it was already possible for gentle people to have homes, without fighting to defend them. One could fancy that its calm and infinitely comfortable history had never been ruffled from that day to this. He recalled having heard it mentioned the previous evening that the house stood upon the site of an old monastery. No doubt that accounted for its being built in a hollow, with the ground-floor on the absolute level of the earth outside. The monks had always chosen these low-lying sheltered spots for their cloisters.

Why should they have done so? he wondered—and then came to a sudden mental stop, absorbed in a somewhat surprised contemplation of a new version of himself. He was becoming literary, historical, bookish! His mind had begun to throw open again, to abstract thoughts and musings, its long-closed doors. He had read and dreamed so much as a lad, in the old book-shop! For many years that boyhood of eager concern in the printed page had seemed to him to belong to somebody else. Now, all at once, it came back to him as his own possession; he felt that he could take up books again where he had dropped them, perhaps even with the old rapt, intent zest.

Visions rose before him of the magnificent library he would gather for himself. And it should be in no wise for show—the gross ostentation of the unlettered parvenu

—but a genuine library, which should minister to his own individual culture. The thought took instant hold upon his interest. By that road, his progress to the goal of gentility would be smooth and simple. He seemed not to have reasoned it out to himself in detail before, but now, at all events, he saw his way clearly enough. Why should he be tormented with doubts and misgivings about himself, as if he had come out of the gutter?

Why indeed? He had passed through — and with credit, too—one of the great public schools of England. He had been there on a footing of perfect equality, so far as he saw, with the sons of aristocratic families or of great City potentates. And as to birth, he had behind him three generations at least of scholarly men, men who knew the contents, as well as the commercial value, of the books they handled.

His grandfather had been a man of note in his calling. The tradition of Lord Althorp's confidence in him, and of how he requited it by securing Caxton's "Golden Legend" for the library of that distinguished collector, under the very nose of his hot rival, the Duke of Marlborough, was tenderly cherished as an heirloom in the old shop. And Thorpe's father, too, though no such single achievement crowned his memory, had been the adviser and, as one might say, the friend of many notable writers and patrons of literature. The son of such forbears needed only money to be recognized by everybody as a gentleman.

On his mother's side, now that he thought of it, there was something perhaps better still than a heritage of librarians' craft and tastes. His mother's maiden name was Stormont, and he remembered well enough the solemnity with which she had always alluded to the fact, in the course of domestic discussions. Who the Stor-

"TWO HORSES WITH RIDERS, ADVANCING AT A BRISK CANTER."—*Page 77.*

monts were he could not recall that he had ever learned, but his mother had been very clear indeed about their superiority to the usual ruck of people. He would ask his sister whether she knew anything about them. In the meantime there was no denying that Stormont was a fine-sounding name. He reflected that it was his own middle name—and, on the instant, fancy engraved for him a card-plate on which appeared the legend—"Mr. Stormont Thorpe."

It was an inspiration! "Joel" he had not used for so many years that now, after six months' familiarity with it on his sister's lips, he could not get accustomed to it. The colourless and non-committal style of "J. S. Thorpe," under which he had lived so long, had been well enough for the term of his exile—the weary time of obscure toil and suspense. But now, in this sunburst of smiling fortune, when he had achieved the right to a name of distinction—here it was ready to his hand. A fleeting question as to whether he should carry the "J" along as an initial put itself to his mind. He decided vigorously against it. He had always had a prejudice against men who, in the transatlantic phrase, parted either their hair or their names in the middle.

He had made his unheeding way past the house to the beginning of the avenue of trees, which he remembered from the previous evening's drive. To his right, an open space of roadway led off in the direction of the stables. As he hesitated, in momentary doubt which course to take, the sound of hoofs in the avenue caught his ear, and he stood still. In a moment there came into view, round a curve in the leafy distance, two horses with riders, advancing at a brisk canter. Soon he perceived that the riders were ladies; they drew rein as they approached him, and then it was to be seen that they were the pair

he had judged to be such close friends last night—Lady Cressage and the daughter of the house.

They smiled and nodded down at him, as he lifted his cap and bowed. Their cheeks were glowing and their eyes sparkling with the exhilaration of their ride. Even the Hon. Winifred looked comely and distinguished in his eyes, under the charm of this heightened vivacity. She seemed to carry herself better in the saddle than she did out of it; the sweep of her habit below the stirrup lent dignity to her figure.

But her companion, whose big chestnut mount was pacing slowly toward the stepping-block — how should he bring within the compass of thought the impressions he had had of her as she passed? There seemed to have been no memory in his mind to prepare him for the beauty of the picture she had made. Slender, erect, exquisitely-tailored, she had gone by like some queen in a pageant, gracious yet unapproachable. He stared after her, mutely bewildered at the effect she produced upon him—until he saw that a groom had run from the stable-yard, and was helping the divinity to dismount. The angry thought that he might have done this himself rose within him—but there followed swiftly enough the answering conviction that he lacked the courage. He did not even advance to proffer his services to the other young lady, while there was still time. The truth was, he admitted ruefully to himself, they unnerved him.

He had talked freely enough to them, or rather to the company of which they made part, the previous evening. There had been an hour or more, indeed, before the party broke up, in which he had borne the lion's share of the talk—and they had appeared as frankly entertained as the others. In fact, when he recalled the circle of faces to which he had addressed his monologue of reminiscences—

curious experiences and adventures in Java and the Argentine, in Brazil and the Antilles and Mexico and the far West—it was in the face of Lady Cressage that he seemed to discern the most genuine interest.

Why should she frighten him, then, by daylight? The whimsical theory that the wine at dinner had given him a spurious courage occurred to him. He shrugged his shoulders at it, and, with his hands in his pockets, turned toward the stables.

The stable-yard is, from some points of view, the prettiest thing about Hadlow. There is a big, uneven, grass-grown space, in the centre of which, from a slight mound, springs an aged oak of tremendous girth and height. All around this enclosure are buildings of the same pale yellowish brick as the mansion itself, but quaintly differing one from another in design and size. Stables, carriage-houses, kennels, a laundry, a brewery, and half a dozen structures the intention of which is now somewhat uncertain—some flat-topped, some gabled, others with turrets, or massive grouped chimneys, or overhanging timbered upper stories—form round this unkempt, shadowed green a sort of village, with a communal individuality of its own.

A glance shows its feudal relation to, and dependence upon, the great house behind which it nestles; some of the back-kitchens and offices of this great house, indeed, straggle out till they meet and merge themselves into this quadrangle. None the less, it presents to the enquiring gaze a specific character, of as old a growth, one might think, as the oak itself. Here servants have lived, it may be, since man first learned the trick of setting his foot on his brother's neck. Plainly enough, the monks' servants lived and worked here; half the buildings on the side nearest the house belong to their time, and one of them still bears a partially-defaced coat of arms that must have

belonged to an Abbot. And when lay lord succeeded cleric, only the garb and vocabulary of servitude were altered in this square. Its population crossed themselves less, and worked much harder, but they remained in a world of their own, adjacent and subject to the world of their masters, yet separated from it by oh ! such countless and unthinkable distances.

Thorpe sauntered along the side of the stables. He counted three men and a boy who visibly belonged to this department. The dog-cart of the previous evening had been run out upon the brick-pavement which drained the stables, and glistened with expensive smartness now beneath the sponge of one of the hostlers. Under cover, he discerned two other carriages, and there seemed to be at least half a dozen horses. The men who, in the half gloom of the loose-boxes, were busy grooming these animals made a curious whistling noise as they worked. Everybody in the yard touched a forelock to him as he passed.

From this quaint, old-world enclosure he wandered at his leisure, through an open gate in the wall at the back, into the gardens behind the house. There was not much in the way of flowers to look at, but he moved about quite unconscious of any deprivation. A cluster of greenhouses, massed against the southern side of the mansion, attracted his listless fancy, and he walked toward what appeared to be an entrance to them. The door was locked, but he found another further on which opened to his hand. The air was very hot and moist inside, and the place was so filled with broad-leaved, umbrageous tropical plants that he had to stoop to make his way through to the end. The next house had a more tolerable atmosphere, and contained some blossoms to which he gave momentary attention. In the third house, through the glass-door, he could

see a man—evidently a gardener—lifting some pots to a shelf overhead.

The thought occurred to him that by entering into conversation with this man, he might indirectly obtain a hint as to the usual breakfast-hour at Hadlow. It was now nearly ten o'clock, and he was getting very hungry. Would they not ring a bell, or sound a gong, or something ? he wondered. Perhaps there had been some such summons, and he had not heard it. It might be the intelligent thing for him to return to the house, at all events, and sit in the hall where the servants could see him, in case the meal was in progress.

Looking idly through the glass at the gardener, meanwhile, it suddenly dawned upon him that the face and figure were familiar. He stared more intently at the man, casting about in his memory for a clue to his identity. It came to him that the person he had in mind was a fellow named Gafferson, who had kept an impoverished and down-at-the-heels sort of hotel and general store on the road from Belize to Boon Town, in British Honduras. Yes, it undoubtedly was Gafferson. What on earth was he doing here ?

Thorpe gave but brief consideration to this problem. It was of more immediate importance to recall the circumstances of his contact with the man. He had made Gafferson's poor shanty of an hotel his headquarters for the better part of a month—the base of supplies from which he made numerous prospecting tours into the mountains of the interior. Had he paid his bill on leaving ? Yes, there was no doubt about that. He could even recall a certain pity for the unbusiness-like scale of charges, and the lack of perception of opportunity, which characterized the bill in question. He remembered now his impression that Gafferson would never do any good. It would be interesting to

know what kind of an impression he, in turn, had produced on his thriftless host. At any rate, there was no good reason why he should not find out. He opened the door and went in.

The gardener barely looked up from his occupation, and drew aside to let the newcomer pass with no sign of a gesture toward his cap. Thorpe halted, and tried to look at the pots on the staging as if he knew about such things.

"What are you doing?" he asked, in the tentative tone of one who is in no need of information, but desires to be affable.

"Drying off the first lot of gloxinias," answered the other. "Some people put 'em on their sides, but I like 'em upright, close to the glass. It stands to reason, if you think about it."

"Why, certainly," said Thorpe, with conviction. In his mind he contrasted the independence of Gafferson's manner with the practised servility of the stable-yard—and thought that he liked it—and then was not so sure. He perceived that there was no recognition of him. The gardener, as further desultory conversation about his work progressed, looked his interlocutor full in the face, but with a placid, sheep-like gaze which seemed to be entirely insensible to variations in the human species.

"How did you ever get back here to England?" Thorpe was emboldened to ask at last. In comment upon the other's stare of puzzled enquiry, he went on: "You 're Gafferson, are n't you? I thought so. When I last saw you, you were running a sort of half-way house, t' other side of Belize. That was in '90."

Gafferson—a thick-set, squat man of middle age, with a straggling reddish beard—turned upon him a tranquil but uninformed eye. "I suppose you would have been stopping at Government House," he remarked. "That was

in Sir Roger Goldsworthy's time. They used to come out often to see my flowers. And so you remembered my name. I suppose it was because of the Gaffersoniana hybrids. There was a good bit in the papers about them last spring."

Thorpe nodded an assent which it seemed better not to put into words. "Well, it beats all," he mused aloud. "Why, man, there 's gold in those mountains! You had an inside track on prospecting, placed as you were. And there 's cocoa—and some day they 'll coin money in rubber, too. All that country 's waiting for is better communications. And you were on the spot, and knew all the lay of the land—and yet here you are back in England, getting so much a month for messing about in the mud."

He saw swiftly that his reflections had carried him beyond his earlier limit, and with rapidity decided upon frankness. "No, I was n't in the Governor's outfit at all. I was looking for gold then—with occasionally an eye on rubber. I stopped at your place. Don't you remember me? My name 's Thorpe. I had a beard then. Why, man, you and one of your niggers were with me three or four days once, up on the ridge beyond the Burnt Hills—why, you remember, the nigger was from San Domingo, and he was forever bragging about the San Domingo peppers, and saying those on the mainland had n't enough strength to make a baby wrinkle his nose, and you found a pepper coming through the swamp, and you tipped me the wink, and you handed that pepper to the nigger, and it damned near killed him. Hell! You *must* remember that!"

"That would have been the *Chavica pertusum*," said Gafferson, thoughtfully. He seemed to rouse himself to an interest in the story itself with some difficulty. "Yes —I remember it," he admitted, finally. "I should n't

have known you though. I 'm the worst in the world about remembering people. It seems to be growing on me. I notice that when I go up to London to the shows, I don't remember the men that I had the longest talks with the time before. Once you get wrapped up in your flowers, you 've got no room in your head for anything else—that 's the way of it."

Thorpe considered him with a ruminating eye. " So this is the sort of thing you really like, eh? You 'd rather be doing this, eh? than making your pile in log-wood and mahogany out there, or floating a gold mine?"

Gafferson answered quite simply : " I was n't the kind to ever make a pile. I got led into going out there when I was a youngster, and there did n't seem to be any good in trying to get back, but I was n't making more than a bare living when you were there, and after that I did n't even do that much. It took me a good many years to find out what my real fancy was. I hated my hotel and my store, but I was crazy about my garden. Finally an American gentleman came along one day, and he put up at my place, and he saw that I was as near ruined as they make 'em, and he says to me, ' You 're no good to run a hotel, nor yet a store, and this aint your country for a cent. What you 're born for is to grow flowers. You can't afford to do it here, because nobody 'll pay you for it, but you gather up your seeds and roots and so on, and come along with me to Atlanta, Georgia, and I 'll put fat on your bones.'

" That 's what he said to me, and I took him at his word, and I was with him two years, and then I thought I 'd like to come to England, and since then I 've worked my way up here, till now I take a Royal Horticultural medal regular, and there 's a clematis with salmon-coloured bars that 'll be in the market next spring that 's

named after my master. And what could I ask more 'n that?"

"Quite right," said Thorpe. "What time do they have breakfast here?"

The gardener's round, phlegmatic, florid countenance had taken on a mild glow of animation during his narrative. It relapsed into lethargy at the advent of this new topic.

"It seems to me they eat at all hours," he said. "But if you want to see his Lordship," he went on, considering, "about noon would be your best time."

"See his Lordship!" repeated Thorpe, with an impatient grin. "Why I 'm a guest here in the house. All I want is something to eat."

"A guest," Gafferson repeated in turn, slowly. There was nothing unpleasant in the intonation, and Thorpe's sharp glance failed to detect any trace of offensive intention in his companion's fatuous visage. Yet it seemed to pass between the two men that Gafferson was surprised, and that there were abundant grounds for his surprise.

"Why, yes," said Thorpe, with as much nonchalance as he could summon, "your master is one of my directors. I 've taken a fancy to him, and I 'm going to make a rich man of him. He was keen about my seeing his place here, and kept urging me to come, and so finally I 've got away over Sunday to oblige him. By the way—I shall buy an estate in the country as soon as the right thing offers, and I shall want to set up no end of gardens and greenhouses and all that. I see that I could n't come to a better man than you for advice. I daresay I 'll put the whole arrangement of it in your hands. You 'd like that, would n't you?"

"Whatever his Lordship agrees to," the gardener re-

plied, sententiously. He turned to the staging, and took up one of the pots.

Thorpe swung on his heel, and moved briskly toward the further door, which he could see opened upon the lawn. He was conscious of annoyance with this moon-faced, dawdling Gafferson, who had been afforded such a splendid chance of profiting by an old acquaintanceship—it might even be called, as things went in Honduras, a friendship—and who had so clumsily failed to rise to the situation. The bitter thought of going back and giving him a half-crown rose in Thorpe's inventive mind, and he paused for an instant, his hand on the door-knob, to think it over. The gratuity would certainly put Gafferson in his place, but then the spirit in which it was offered would be wholly lost on his dull brain. And moreover, was it so certain that he would take it? He had not said "sir" once, and he had talked about medals with the pride of a scientist. The rules were overwhelmingly against a gardener rejecting a tip, of course, but if there was no more than one chance in twenty of it, Thorpe decided that he could not afford the risk.

He quitted the greenhouse with resolution, and directed his steps toward the front of the mansion. As he entered the hall, a remarkably tuneful and resonant chime filled his ears with novel music. He looked and saw that a white-capped, neatly-clad domestic, standing with her back to him beside the newel-post of the stairs, was beating out the tune with two padded sticks upon some strips of metal ranged on a stand of Indian workmanship. The sound was delightful, but even more so was the implication that it betokened breakfast.

With inspiration, he drew forth the half-crown which he had been fingering in his pocket, and gave it to the girl as she turned. "That 's the kind of concert I like,"

he declared, bestowing the patronage of a jovial smile upon her pleased and comely face. "Show me the way to this breakfast that you 've been serenading about."

Out in the greenhouse, meanwhile, Gafferson continued to regard blankly the shrivelled, fatty leaves of the plant he had taken up. "Thorpe," he said aloud, as if addressing the tabid gloxinia—"Thorpe—yes—I remember his initials—J. S. Thorpe. Now, who 's the man that told me about him? and what was it he told me?"

CHAPTER VII

THE experiences of the breakfast room were very agreeable indeed. Thorpe found himself the only man present, and, after the first few minutes of embarrassment at this discovery, it filled him with surprised delight to note how perfectly he was at his ease. He could never have imagined himself seated with four ladies at a table—three of them, moreover, ladies of title—and doing it all so well.

For one thing, the ladies themselves had a morning manner, so to speak, which differed widely from the impressions he had had of their deportment the previous evening. They seemed now to be as simple and fresh and natural as the unadorned frocks they wore. They listened with an air of good-fellowship to him when he spoke ; they smiled at the right places ; they acted as if they liked him, and were glad of his company.

The satisfied conviction that he was talking well, and behaving well, accompanied him in his progress through the meal. His confession at the outset of his great hunger, and of the sinister apprehensions which had assailed him in his loitering walk about the place, proved a most fortuitous beginning ; after that, they were ready to regard everything he said as amusing.

" Oh, when we 're by ourselves," the kindly little old hostess explained to him, " my daughter and I breakfast always at nine. That was our hour yesterday morning, for example. But when my son is here, then it 's farewell to

regularity. We put breakfast back till ten, then, as a kind of compromise between our own early habits and his lack of any sort of habits. Why we do it I could n't say —because he never comes down in any event. He sleeps so well at Hadlow—and you know in town he sleeps very ill indeed—and so we don't dream of complaining. We 're only too glad—for his sake."

"And Balder," commented the sister, "he 's as bad the other way. He gets up at some unearthly hour, and has his tea and a sandwich from the still-room, and goes off with his rod or his gun or the dogs, and we never see him till luncheon."

"I 've been on the point of asking so many times," Miss Madden interposed—"is Balder a family name, or is it after the Viking in Matthew Arnold's poem?"

"It was his father's choice," Lady Plowden made answer. "I think the Viking explanation is the right one —it certainly is n't in either family. I can't say that it attracted me much—at first, you know."

"Oh, but it fits him so splendidly," said Lady Cressage. "He looks the part, as they say. I always thought it was the best of all the soldier names—and you have only to look at him to see that he was predestined for a soldier from his cradle."

"I wish the Sandhurst people would have a good long look at him, then," put in the mother with earnestness underlying the jest of her tone. "The poor boy will never pass those exams in the world. It *is* ridiculous, as his father always said. If there ever was a man who was made for a soldier, it 's Balder. He 's a gentleman, and he 's connected by tradition with the Army, and he 's mad about everything military—and surely he 's as clever as anybody else at everything except that wretched matter of books, and even there it 's only a defect of memory—

and yet that suffices to prevent his serving his Queen. And all over England there are young gentlemen like that —the very pick of the hunting-fields, strong and brave as lions, fit to lead men anywhere, the very men England wants to have fighting her battles—and they can't get places in the Army because—what was it Balder came to grief over last time?—because they can't remember whether it 's Ispahan or Teheran that 's the capital of Persia.

"They are the fine old sort that would go and capture both places at the point of the bayonet—and find out their names afterward—but it seems that 's not what the Army wants nowadays. What is desired now is superior clerks, and secretaries and professors of languages—and much good they will do us when the time of trouble comes!"

"Then you think the purchase-system was better?" asked the American lady. "It always seemed to me that that must have worked so curiously."

"Prefer it?" said Lady Plowden. "A thousand times yes! My husband made one of the best speeches in the debate on it—one do I say? first and last he must have made a dozen of them. If anything could have kept the House of Lords firm, in the face of the wretched Radical outcry, it would have been those speeches. He pointed out all the evils that would follow the change. You might have called it prophetic—the way he foresaw what would happen to Balder—or not Balder in particular, of course, but that whole class of young gentlemen.

"As he said, you have only to ask yourself what kind of people the lower classes naturally look up to and obey and follow. Will they be ordered about by a man simply because he knows Greek and Latin and Hebrew? Do they respect the village schoolmaster, for example, on account of his learning? Not in the very slightest! On

the contrary, they regard him with the greatest contempt. The man they will serve is the man whose birth gives him the right to command them, or else the man with money in his pockets to make it worth their while. These two are the only leaders they understand. And if that 's true here in England, in times of peace, among our own people, how much truer must it be of our soldiers, away from England, in a time of war? "

" But, mamma," the Hon. Winifred intervened, " don't you see how badly that might work nowadays? now that the good families have so little money, and all the fortunes are in the hands of stock-jobbing people—and so on? It would be *their* sons who would buy all the commissions—and I 'm sure Balder would n't get on at all with that lot."

Lady Plowden answered with decision and great promptness. " You see so little of the world, Winnie dear, that you don't get very clear ideas of its movements. The people who make fortunes in England are every whit as important to its welfare as those who inherit names, and individually I 'm sure they are often much more deserving. Every generation sniffs at its *nouveaux riches*, but by the next they have become merged in the aristocracy. It is n't a new thing in England at all. It has always been that way. Two-thirds of the peerage have their start from a wealthy merchant, or some other person who made a fortune. They are really the back-bone of England. You should keep that always in mind."

" Of course—I see what you mean "—Winnie replied, her dark cheek flushing faintly under the tacit reproof. She had passed her twenty-fifth birthday, but her voice had in it the docile self-repression of a school-girl. She spoke with diffident slowness, her gaze fastened upon her plate. " Of course—my grandfather was a lawyer—

and your point is that merchants—and others who make fortunes—would be the same."

"Precisely," said Lady Plowden. "And do tell us, Mr. Thorpe"—she turned toward where he sat at her right and beamed at him over her spectacles, with the air of having been wearied with a conversation in which he bore no part—"is it really true that social discontent is becoming more marked in America, even, than it is with us in England?"

"I 'm not an American, you know," he reminded her. "I only know one or two sections of the country—and those only as a stranger. You should ask Miss Madden."

"Me?" said Cella. "Oh, I have n't come up for my examinations yet. I 'm like Balder—I 'm preparing."

"What I should like Mr. Thorpe to tell us," suggested Lady Cressage, mildly, "is about the flowers in the tropics —in Java, for example, or some of the West Indies. One hears such marvelous tales about them."

"Speaking of flowers," Thorpe suddenly decided to mention the fact; "I met out in one of the greenhouses here this morning, an old acquaintance of mine, the gardener, Gafferson. The last time I saw him, he was running the worst hotel in the world in the worst country in the world—out in British Honduras."

"But he 's a wonderful gardener," said Lady Cressage. "He 's a magician; he can do what he likes with plants. It 's rather a hobby of mine—or used to be—and I never saw his equal."

Thorpe told them about Gafferson, in that forlorn environment on the Belize road, and his success in making them laugh drew him on to other pictures of the droll side of life among the misfits of adventure. The ladies visibly dallied over their tea-cups to listen to him; the charm of having them all to himself, and of holding them in inter-

ested entertainment by his discourse—these ladies of supremely refined associations and position—seemed to provide an inspiration of its own. He could hear that his voice was automatically modulating itself to their critical ears. His language was producing itself with as much delicacy of selection as if it came out of a book—and yet preserving the savour of quaint, outlandish idiom which his listeners clearly liked. Upon the instant when Lady Plowden's gathering of skirts, and glance across the table, warned him that they were to rise, he said deliberately to himself that this had been the most enjoyable episode of his whole life.

There were cigar boxes on the fine old oak mantel, out in the hall, and Winnie indicated them to him with the obvious suggestion that he was expected to smoke. He looked her over as he lit his cigar—where she stood spreading her hands above the blaze of the logs, and concluded that she was much nicer upon acquaintance than he had thought. Her slight figure might not be beautiful, but beyond doubt its lines were ladylike. The same extenuating word applied itself in his mind to her thin and swarthy, though distinguished, features. They bore the stamp of caste, and so did the way she looked at one through her eye-glasses, from under those over-heavy black eyebrows, holding her head a little to one side. Though it was easy enough to guess that she had a spirit of her own, her gentle, almost anxious, deference to her mother had shown that she had it under admirable control.

He had read about her in a peerage at his sister's bookshop the previous day. Unfortunately it did not give her age, but that was not so important, after all. She was styled Honourable. She was the daughter of one Viscount and the sister of another. Her grandfather had been an Earl, and the book had shown her to possess a

bewildering number of relationships among titled folks. All this was very interesting to him—and somewhat suggestive. Vague, shapeless hints at projects rose in his brain as he looked at her.

"I 'm afraid you think my brother has odd notions of entertaining his guests," she remarked to him, over her shoulder. The other ladies had not joined them.

"Oh, I 'm all right," he protested cordially. "I should hate to have him put himself out in the slightest." Upon consideration he added: "I suppose he has given up the idea of shooting to-day."

"I think not," she answered. "The keeper was about this morning, that is—and he does n't often come unless they are to go out with the guns. I suppose you are very fond of shooting."

"Well—I 've done some—in my time," Thorpe replied, cautiously. It did not seem necessary to explain that he had yet to fire his first gun on English soil. "It 's a good many years," he went on, "since I had the time and opportunity to do much at it. I think the last shooting I did was alligators. You hit 'em in the eye, you know. But what kind of a hand I shall make of it with a shot-gun, I have n't the least idea. Is the shooting round here pretty good?"

"I don't think it 's anything remarkable. Plowden says my brother Balder kills all the birds off every season. Balder 's by way of being a crack-shot, you know. There are some pheasants, though. We saw them flying when we were out this morning."

Thorpe wondered if it would be possible to consult her upon the question of apparel. Clearly, he ought to make some difference in his garb, yet the mental vision of himself in those old Mexican clothes revealed itself now as ridiculously impossible. He must have been out of his

mind to have conceived anything so preposterous as rigging himself out, among these polished people, like a cow-puncher down on his luck.

"I wonder when your brother will expect to start," he began, uneasily. "Perhaps I ought to go and get ready."

"Ah, here comes his man," remarked the sister.

A round-faced, smooth-mannered youngster—whom Thorpe discovered to be wearing cord-breeches and leather leggings as he descended the stairs—advanced toward him and prefaced his message by the invariable salutation. "His Lordship will be down, sir, in ten minutes—and he hopes you 'll be ready, sir," the valet said.

"Send Pangbourn to this gentleman's room," Miss Winnie bade him, and with a gesture of comprehensive submission he went away.

The calm readiness with which she had provided a solution for his difficulties impressed Thorpe greatly. It would never have occurred to him that Pangbourn was the answer to the problem of his clothes, yet how obvious it had been to her. These old families did something more than fill their houses with servants; they mastered the art of making these servants an integral part of the machinery of existence. Fancy having a man to do all your thinking about clothes for you, and then dress you, into the bargain. Oh, it was all splendid.

"It seems that we 're going shooting," Thorpe found himself explaining, a few moments later in his bedroom, to the attentive Pangbourn. He decided to throw himself with frankness upon the domestic's resourceful good-feeling. "I have n't brought anything for shooting at all. Somehow I got the idea we were going to do rough riding instead—and so I fetched along some old Mexican riding-clothes that make me feel more at home in the saddle than anything else would. You know how fond a

man gets of old, loose things like that. But about this shooting—I want you to fix me out. What do I need? Just some breeches and leggings, eh? You can manage them for me, can't you?"

Pangbourn could and did—and it was upon his advice that the Mexican jacket was utilized to complete the outfit. Its shape was beyond doubt uncommon, but it had big pockets, and it looked like business. Thorpe, as he glanced up and down his image in the tall mirror of the wardrobe, felt that he must kill a large number of birds to justify the effect of pitiless proficiency which this jacket lent to his appearance.

"We will find a cap below, sir," Pangbourn announced, with serenity, and Thorpe, who had been tentatively fingering the big, flaring sombrero, thrust it back upon its peg as if it had proved too hot to handle.

Downstairs in the hall there was more waiting to be done, and there was nobody now to bear him company. He lit another cigar, tried on various caps till he found a leathern one to suit him, and then dawdled about the room and the adjoining conservatory for what seemed to him more than half an hour. This phase of the aristocratic routine, he felt, did not commend itself so warmly to him as did some others. Everybody else, however, seemed to regard it as so wholly a matter of course that Plowden should do as he liked, that he forbore formulating a complaint even to himself.

At last, this nobleman's valet descended the stairs once more. "His Lordship will be down very shortly now, sir," he declared—"and will you be good enough to come into the gun-room, sir, and see the keeper?"

Thorpe followed him through a doorway under the staircase—the existence of which he had not suspected—into a bare-looking apartment fitted like a pantry with

shelves. After the semi-gloom of the hall, it was almost glaringly lighted. The windows and another door opened, he saw, upon a court connected with the stable-yard. By this entrance, no doubt, had come the keeper, a small, brown-faced, brown-clothed man of mature years, with the strap of a pouch over his shoulder, who stood looking at the contents of the shelves. He mechanically saluted Thorpe in turn, and then resumed his occupation. There were numerous gun cases on the lower shelf, and many boxes and bags above.

"Did his Lordship say what gun?" the keeper demanded of the valet. He had a bright-eyed, intent glance, and his tone conveyed a sense of some broad, impersonal, out-of-doors disdain for liveried house-men.

The valet, standing behind Thorpe, shrugged his shoulders and eloquently shook his head.

"Do you like an 'ammerless, sir?" The keeper turned to Thorpe.

To his intense humiliation, Thorpe could not make out the meaning of the query. "Oh, anything 'll do for me," he said, awkwardly smiling. "It 's years since I 've shot—I daresay one gun 'll be quite the same as another to me."

He felt the knowing bright eyes of the keeper taking all his measurements as a sportsman. "You 'd do best with 'B,' sir, I fancy," the functionary decided at last, and his way of saying it gave Thorpe the notion that "B" must be the weapon that was reserved for schoolboys. He watched the operation of putting the gun together, and then took it, and laid it over his arm, and followed the valet out into the hall again, in dignified silence. To the keeper's remark—"Mr. Balder has its mate with him today, sir," he gave only a restrained nod.

There were even now whole minutes to wait before Lord Plowden appeared. He came down the stairs then with the brisk, rather impatient air of a busy man whose plans are embarrassed by the unpunctuality of others. He was fully attired, hob-nailed shoes, leggings, leather coat and cap, gloves, scarf round his throat and all—and he behaved as if there was not a minute to lose. He had barely time to shake perfunctorily the hand Thorpe offered him, and utter an absent-minded "How are you this morning?"

To the valet, who hurried forward to open the outer door, bearing his master's gun and a camp-stool, he said reproachfully, "We are very late today, Barnes." They went out, and began striding down the avenue of trees at such a pace that the keeper and his following of small boys and dogs, who joined them near the road, were forced into a trot to keep up with it.

Thorpe had fancied, somehow, that a day's shooting would afford exceptional opportunities for quiet and intimate talk with his host, but he perceived very soon that this was not to be the case. They walked together for half a mile, it is true, along a rural bye-road first and then across some fields, but the party was close at their heels, and Plowden walked so fast that conversation of any sort, save an occasional remark about the birds and the covers between him and the keeper, was impracticable. The Hon. Balder suddenly turned up in the landscape, leaning against a gate set in a hedgerow, and their course was deflected toward him, but even when they came up to him, the expedition seemed to gain nothing of a social character. The few curt words that were exchanged, as they halted here to distribute cartridges and hold brief consultation, bore exclusively upon the subject in hand.

The keeper assumed now an authority which Thorpe,

breathing heavily over the unwonted exercise and hoping for nothing so much as that they would henceforth take things easy, thought intolerable. He was amazed that the two brothers should take without cavil the arbitrary orders of this elderly peasant. He bade Lord Plowden proceed to a certain point in one direction, and that nobleman, followed by his valet with the gun and the stool, set meekly off without a word. Balder, with equal docility, vaulted the gate, and moved away down the lane at the bidding of the keeper. Neither of them had intervened to mitigate the destiny of their guest, or displayed any interest as to what was going to become of him.

Thorpe said to himself that he did not like this—and though afterward, when he had also climbed the gate and taken up his station under a clump of trees at the autocrat's behest, he strove to soothe his ruffled feelings by the argument that it was probably the absolutely correct deportment for a shooting party, his mind remained unconvinced. Moreover, in parting from him, the keeper had dropped a blunt injunction about firing up or down the lane, the tone even more than the matter of which nettled him.

To cap all, when he presently ventured to stroll about a little from the spot on which he had been planted, he caught a glimpse against the skyline of the distant Lord Plowden, comfortably seated on the stool which his valet had been carrying. It seemed to Thorpe at that moment that he had never wanted to sit down so much before in his life—and he turned on his heel in the wet grass with a grunt of displeasure.

This mood vanished utterly a few moments later. The remote sounds had begun to come to him, of boys shouting and dogs barking, in the recesses of the strip of woodland which the lane skirted, and at these he hastened back

to his post. It did not seem to him a good place, and when he heard the reports of guns to right and left of him, and nothing came his way, he liked it less than ever ; it had become a matter of offended pride with him, however, to relieve the keeper of no atom of the responsibility he had taken upon himself. If Lord Plowden's guest had no sport, the blame for it should rest upon Lord Plowden's over-arrogant keeper.

Then a noise of a different character assailed his ears, punctuated as it were by distant boyish cries of "mark!" These cries, and the buzzing sound as of clockwork gone wrong which they accompanied and heralded, became all at once a most urgent affair of his own. He strained his eyes upon the horizon of the thicket—and, as if by instinct, the gun sprang up to adjust its sight to this eager gaze, and followed automatically the thundering course of the big bird, and then, taking thought to itself, leaped ahead of it and fired. Thorpe's first pheasant reeled in the air, described a somersault, and fell like a plummet.

He stirred not a step, but reloaded the barrel with a hand shaking for joy. From where he stood he could see the dead bird ; there could never have been a cleaner "kill." In the warming glow of his satisfaction in himself, there kindled a new liking of a different sort for Plowden and Balder. He owed to them, at this belated hour of his life, a novel delight of indescribable charm. There came to him, from the woods, the shrill bucolic voice of the keeper, admonishing a wayward dog. He was conscious of even a certain tenderness for this keeper —and again the cry of "mark!" rose, strenuously addressed to him.

Half an hour later the wood had been cleared, and Thorpe saw the rest of the party assembling by the gate. He did not hurry to join them, but when Lord Plowden

appeared he sauntered slowly over, gun over arm, with as indifferent an air as he could simulate. It pleased him tremendously that no one had thought it worth while to approach the rendezvous by way of the spot he had covered. His eye took instant stock of the game carried by two of the boys; their combined prizes were eight birds and a rabbit, and his heart leaped within him at the count.

"Well, Thorpe?" asked Plowden, pleasantly. The smell of gunpowder and the sight of stained feathers had co-operated to brighten and cheer his mood. "I heard you blazing away in great form. Did you get anything?"

Thorpe strove hard to give his voice a careless note. "Let some of the boys run over," he said slowly. "There are nine birds within sight, and there are two or three in the bushes—but they may have got away."

"Gad!" said Balder.

"Magnificent!" was his brother's comment—and Thorpe permitted himself the luxury of a long-drawn, beaming sigh of triumph.

The roseate colouring of this triumph seemed really to tint everything that remained of Thorpe's visit. He set down to it without hesitation the visible augmentation of deference to him among the servants. The temptation was very great to believe that it had affected the ladies of the house as well. He could not say that they were more gracious to him, but certainly they appeared to take him more for granted. In a hundred little ways, he seemed to perceive that he was no longer held mentally at arm's length as a stranger to their caste. Of course, his own restored self-confidence could account for much of this, but he clung to the whimsical conceit that much was also due to the fact that he was the man of the pheasants.

Sunday was bleak and stormy, and no one stirred out

of the house. He was alone again with the ladies at breakfast, and during the long day he was much in their company. It was like no other day he had ever imagined to himself.

On the morrow, in the morning train by which he returned alone to town, his mind roved luxuriously among the fragrant memories of that day. He had been so perfectly at home—and in such a home! There were some things which came uppermost again and again—but of them all he dwelt most fixedly upon the recollection of moving about in the greenhouses and conservatories, with that tall, stately, fair Lady Cressage for his guide, and watching her instead of the flowers that she pointed out. Of what she had told him, not a syllable stuck in his mind, but the music of the voice lingered in his ears.

"And she is old Kervick's daughter!" he said to himself more than once.

CHAPTER VIII

IT may be that every other passenger in that morning train to London nursed either a silent rage, or declaimed aloud to fellow-sufferers in indignation, at the time consumed in making what, by the map, should be so brief a journey. In Thorpe's own compartment, men spoke with savage irony of cyclists alleged to be passing them on the road, and exchanged dark prophecies as to the novelties in imbecility and helplessness which the line would be preparing for the Christmas holidays. The old joke about people who had gone travelling years before, and were believed to be still lost somewhere in the recesses of Kent, revived itself amid gloomy approbation. The still older discussion as to whether the South Eastern or the Brighton was really the worst followed naturally in its wake, and occupied its accustomed half-hour—complicated, however, upon this occasion, by the chance presence of a loquacious stranger who said he lived on the Chatham-and-Dover, and who rejected boisterously the idea that any other railway could be half so bad.

The intrusion of this outsider aroused instant resentment, and the champions of the South Eastern and the Brighton, having piled up additional defenses in the shape of personal recollections of delay and mismanagement quite beyond belief, made a combined attack upon the newcomer. He was evidently incapable, their remarks implied, of knowing a bad railway when he saw one. To suggest that the characterless and inoffensive

Chatham-and-Dover, so commonplace in its tame virtues, was to be mentioned in the same breath with the daringly inventive and resourceful malefactors whose rendezvous was London Bridge, showed either a weak mind or a corrupt heart. Did this man really live on the Dover line at all? Angry countenances plainly reflected the doubt.

But to Thorpe the journey seemed short enough—almost too short. The conversation interested him not at all; if he had ever known the Southern lines apart, they were all one to him now. He looked out of the window, and could have sworn that he thought of nothing but the visit from which he was returning.

When he alighted at Cannon Street, however, it was to discover that his mind was full of a large, new, carefully-prepared project. It came to him, ready-made and practically complete, as he stood on the platform, superintending the porter's efforts to find his bags. He turned it over and over in his thoughts, in the hansom, more to familiarize himself with its details than to add to them. He left the cab to wait for him at the mouth of a little alley which delves its way into Old Broad Street through towering walls of commercial buildings, old and new.

Colin Semple was happily in his office—a congeries of small, huddled rooms, dry and dirty with age, which had a doorway of its own in a corner of the court—and Thorpe pushed on to his room at the end like one who is assured of both his way and his welcome.

The broker was standing beside a desk, dictating a letter to a clerk who sat at it, and with only a nod to Thorpe he proceeded to finish this task. He looked more than once at his visitor as he did so, in a preoccupied, impersonal way. To the other's notion, he seemed the personification of business—without an ounce of distracting superfluous flesh upon his wiry, tough little frame, with-

out a trace of unnecessary politeness, or humour, or sensibility of any sort. He was the machine perfected and fined down to absolute essentials. He could understand a joke if it was useful to him to do so. He could drink, and even smoke cigarettes, with a natural air, if these exercises seemed properly to belong to the task he had in hand. Thorpe did not conceive him doing anything for the mere human reason that he liked to do it. There was more than a touch of what the rustic calls "ginger" in his hair and closely-cropped, pointed beard, and he had the complementary florid skin. His eyes—notably direct, confident eyes—were of a grey which had in it more brown than blue. He wore a black frock-coat, buttoned close, and his linen produced the effect of a conspicuous whiteness.

He turned as the clerk left the room, and let his serious, thin lips relax for an instant as a deferred greeting. "Well?" he asked, impassively.

"Have you got a quarter-of-an-hour?" asked Thorpe in turn. "I want a talk with you."

For answer, Semple left the room. Returning after a minute or two, he remarked, "Go ahead till we 're stopped," and seated himself on the corner of the desk with the light inconsequence of a bird on a twig. Thorpe unbuttoned his overcoat, laid aside his hat, and seated himself.

"I 've worked out the whole scheme," he began, as if introducing the product of many sleepless nights' cogitations. "I 'm going to leave England almost immediately—go on the Continent and loaf about—I 've never seen the Continent."

Semple regarded him in silence. "Well?" he observed at last.

"You see the idea, don't you?" Thorpe demanded.

The broker twitched his shoulders slightly. "Go on," he said.

"But the idea is everything," protested the other. "We 've been thinking of beginning the campaign straight away—but the true game now is to lie low—silent as the grave. I go away now, d' ye see? Nothing particular is said about it, of course, but in a month or two somebody notices that I 'm not about, and he happens to mention it to somebody else—and so there gets to be the impression that things have n't gone well with me, d' ye see? On the same plan, I let all the clerks at my office go. The Secretary 'll come round every once in a while to get letters, of course, and perhaps he 'll keep a boy in the front office for show, but practically the place 'll be shut up. That 'll help out the general impression that I 've gone to pieces. Now d' ye see?"

"It 's the Special Settlement you 're thinking of," commented Semple.

"Of course. The fellows that we 're going to squeeze would move heaven and hell to prevent our getting that Settlement, if they got wind of what was going on. The only weak point in our game is just there. Absolutely everything hangs on the Settlement being granted. Naturally, then, our play is to concentrate everything on getting it granted. We don't want to raise the remotest shadow of a suspicion of what we 're up to, till after we 're safe past that rock. So we go on in the way to attract the least possible attention. You or your jobber makes the ordinary application for a Special Settlement, with your six signatures and so on; and I go abroad quietly, and the office is as good as shut up, and nobody makes a peep about Rubber Consols—and the thing works itself. You do see it, don't you?"

"I see well enough the things that are to be seen," re-

plied Semple, with a certain brevity of manner. "There was a sermon of my father's that I remember, and it had for its text, 'We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen.'"

Thorpe, pondering this for a moment, nodded his head. "Semple," he said, bringing his chair forward to the desk, "that 's what I 've come for. I want to spread my cards on the table for you. I know the sum you 've laid out already, in working this thing. We 'll say that that is to be paid back to you, as a separate transaction, and we 'll put that to one side. Now then, leaving that out of consideration, what do you think you ought to have out of the winnings, when we pull the thing off? Mind, I 'm not thinking of your 2,000 vendor's shares——"

"No—I 'm not thinking much of them, either," interposed Semple, with a kind of dry significance.

"Oh, they 'll be all right," Thorpe affirmed. He laughed unconsciously as he did so. "No, what I want to get at is your idea of what should come to you, as a bonus, when I scoop the board."

"Twenty thousand pounds," said Semple, readily.

Thorpe's slow glance brightened a trifle. "I had thought thirty would be a fairer figure," he remarked, with an effort at simplicity.

The broker put out his under-lip. "You will find people rather disposed to distrust a man who promises more than he 's asked," he remarked coldly.

"Yes—I know what you mean," Thorpe hurried to say, flushing awkwardly, even though the remark was so undeserved; "but it 's in my nature. I 'm full of the notion of doing things for people that have done things for me. That 's the way I 'm built. Why"—he halted to consider the advisability of disclosing what he had promised to do for Lord Plowden, and decided against it

—"why, without you, what would the whole thing have been worth to me? Take one thing alone—the money for the applications—I could have no more got at it than I could at the Crown Jewels in the Tower. I 've wondered since, more than once—if you don't mind the question—how did you happen to have so much ready money lying about."

"There are some Glasgow and Aberdeen folk who trust me to invest for them," the broker explained. "If they get five per cent. for the four months, they 'll be very pleased. And so I shall be very pleased to take thirty thousand instead of twenty—if it presents itself to your mind in that way. You will give me a letter to that effect, of course."

"Of course," assented Thorpe. "Write it now, if you like." He pushed his chair forward, closer to the desk, and dipped a pen in the ink. "What I want to do is this," he said, looking up. "I 'll make the promise for thirty-two thousand, and I 'll get you to let me have two thousand in cash now—a personal advance. I shall need it, if I 'm to hang about on the Continent for four months. I judge you think it 'll be four months before things materialize, eh?"

"The Special Settlement, in the natural order of events, would come shortly after the Christmas holidays. That is nearly three months. Then the work of taking fortnightly profits will begin—and it is for you to say how long you allow that to go on."

"But about the two thousand pounds now," Thorpe reminded him.

"I think I will do that in this way," said Semple, kicking his small legs nonchalantly. "I will buy two thousand fully-paid shares of you, for cash down, *not* vendor's shares, you observe—and then I will take your

acknowledgment that you hold them for me in trust up to a given date. In that way, I would not at all weaken your market, and I would have a stake in the game."

"Your stake 's pretty big, already," commented Thorpe, tentatively.

"It 's just a fancy of mine," said the other, with his first smile. "I like to hold shares that are making sensational advances. It is very exciting."

"All right," said Thorpe, in accents of resignation. He wrote out two letters, accepting the wording which Semple suggested from his perch on the desk, and then the latter, hopping down, took the chair in turn and wrote a cheque.

"Do you want it open?" he asked over his shoulder. "Are you going to get it cashed at once?"

"No—cross it," said the other. "I want it to go through my bankers. It 'll warm their hearts toward me. I shan't be going till the end of the week, in any event. I suppose you know the Continent by heart."

"On the contrary, very little indeed. I 've had business in Frankfort once, and in Rotterdam once, and in Paris twice. That is all."

"But don't you ever do anything for pleasure?" Thorpe asked him, as he folded the cheque in his pocket-book.

"Oh yes—many things," responded the broker, lightly. "It 's a pleasure, for example, to buy Rubber Consols at par."

"Oh, if you call it buying," said Thorpe, and then softened his words with an apologetic laugh. "I did n't tell you, did I? I 've been spending Saturday and Sunday with Plowden—you know, the Lord Plowden on my Board."

"I know of him very well," observed the Scotchman.

"Has he a place that he asks people down to, then? That is not the usual form with guinea-pigs."

"Ah, but, he is n't the guinea-pig variety at all," Thorpe asserted, warmly. "He 's really a splendid fellow—with his little oddities, like the rest of us, of course, but a decent chap all through. Place? I should think he *had* got a place! It 's one of the swellest old country-houses you ever saw—older than hell, you know—and it 's kept up as if they had fifty thousand a year. Do you happen to know what his real income is supposed to be?"

Semple shook his head. He had taken his hat, and was smoothing it deftly with the palm of his hand.

"I asked," Thorpe went on, "because he had so much to say about his poverty. To hear him talk, you 'd think the bailiffs were sitting on his doorstep. That does n't prevent his having fast horses, and servants all over the place, and about the best shooting I 've seen in the South of England. As luck would have it, I was in wonderful form. God! how I knocked the pheasants!"

A clerk showed his head at the door, with a meaning gesture. "I must go now," said Semple, briskly, and led the way out to another room. He halted here, and dismissed his caller with the brief injunction, "Don't go away without seeing me."

It was the noon-hour, and the least-considered grades of the City's slaves were in the streets on the quest for cheap luncheons. Thorpe noted the manner in which some of them studied the large bill of fare placarded beside a restaurant door; the spectacle prompted him luxuriously to rattle the gold coins remaining in his pocket. He had been as anxious about pence as the hungriest of those poor devils, only a week before. And now! He thrust up the door in the roof of the cab, and bade the driver stop at his bank. Thence, after some

brief but very agreeable business, and a hurried inspection of the "Court" section of a London Directory, he drove to a telegraph station and despatched two messages. They were identical in terms. One sought General Kervick at his residence—he was in lodgings somewhere in the Hanover Square country—and the other looked for him at his club. Both begged him to lunch at the Savoy at two o'clock.

There was time and to spare, now. Thorpe dismissed the cab at his hotel—an unpretentious house in Craven Street, and sent his luggage to his rooms. There were no letters for him on the board in the hallway, and he sauntered up to the Strand. As by force of habit, he turned presently into a side-street, and stopped opposite the ancient book-shop of his family.

In the bright yet mellow light of the sunny autumn noontide, the blacks and roans and smoked drabs of the low old brick front looked more dingy to his eye than ever. It spoke of antiquity, no doubt, but it was a dismal and graceless antiquity of narrow purposes and niggling thrift. It was so little like the antiquity, for example, of Hadlow House, that the two might have computed their age by the chronological systems of different planets. Although his sister's married name was Dabney, and she had been sole proprietor for nearly a dozen years, the sign over the doorway bore still its century-old legend, "Thorpe, Bookseller."

He crossed the street, and paused for a moment to run an eye over the books and placards exposed on either side of the entrance. A small boy guarded these wares, and Thorpe considered him briefly, with curious recollections of how much of his own boyhood had been spent on that very spot. The lad under observation had a loutish and sullen face; its expression could not have been more de-

void of intellectual suggestions if he had been posted in a Wiltshire field to frighten crows with a rattle, instead of being set here in the highway of the world's brain-movement, an agent of students and philosophers. Thorpe wondered if in his time he could have looked such a vacant and sour young fool. No—no. That could not be. Boys were different in his day—and especially boys in bookshops. They read something and knew something of what they handled. They had some sort of aspirations, fitful and vague as these might be, to become in their time bookmen also. And in those days there still were bookmen—widely-informed, observant, devoted old bookmen—who loved their trade, and adorned it.

Thorpe reflected that, as he grew older, he was the better able to apprehend the admirable qualities of that departed race of literature's servants. Indeed, it seemed that he had never adequately realized before how proud a man might well be of descending from a line of such men. The thought struck him that very likely at this identical doorway, two generations back, a poor, out-at-the-elbows, young law-student named Plowden had stood and turned over pages of books he could not dream of buying. Perhaps, even, he had ventured inside, and deferentially picked acquaintance with the Thorpe of the period, and got bookish advice and friendly counsel for nothing. It was of no real significance that the law-student grew to be Lord Chancellor, and the bookseller remained a bookseller ; in the realm of actual values, the Thorpes were as good as the Plowdens.

A customer came out of the shop, and Thorpe went in, squeezing his way along the narrow passage between the tall rows of books, to the small open space at the end. His sister stood here, momentarily occupied at a high desk. She did not look up.

"Well—I visited his Lordship all right." He announced his presence thus genially.

"I hope you 're the better for it," she remarked, turning to him, after a pause, her emotionless, plain face.

"Oh, immensely," he affirmed, with robust jocularity. "You should have seen the way they took to me. It was 'Mr. Thorpe' here and 'Mr. Thorpe' there, all over the place. Ladies of title, mind you—all to myself at breakfast two days running. And such ladies—finer than silk. Oh, it 's clear as daylight—I was intended for a fashionable career."

She smiled in a faint, passive way. "Well—they say 'better late than never,' you know."

"And after all, *is* it so very late?" he said, adopting her phrase as an expression of his thought. "I 'm just turned forty, and I feel like a boy. I was looking at that 'Peerage' there, the other day—and do you know, I 'm sixteen years younger than the first Lord Plowden was when they made him a peer? Why he did n't even get into the House of Commons until he was seven-and-forty."

"You seem to have the Plowden family on the brain," she commented.

"I might have worse things. You 've no idea, Lou, how nice it all is. The mother, Lady Plowden—why she made me feel as if I was at the very least a nephew of hers. And so simple and natural! She smiled at me, and listened to me, and said friendly things to me—why, just as anybody might have done. You 'll just love her, when you know her."

Louisa laughed in his face. "Don't be a fool, Joel," she adjured him, with a flash of scornful mirth.

He mingled a certain frowning impatience with the buoyancy of his smile. "Why, of course, you 'll know her" he protested. "What nonsense you 're thinking

of! Do you suppose I 'm going to allow you to mess about here with second-hand almanacs, and a sign in your window of ' threepence in the shilling discount for cash,' while I 'm a millionaire? It 's too foolish, Lou. You annoy me by supposing such a thing!"

"There 's no good talking about it at all," she observed, after a little pause. "It has n't come off yet, for one thing. And as I said the other night, if you want to do things for the children, that 's another matter. They 're of an age when they can learn whatever anybody chooses to teach them."

"Where are they now?" he asked. Upon the instant another plan began to unfold itself in the background of his mind.

"They 're both at Cheltenham, though they 're at different places, of course. I was recommended to send Julia there—one of our old customers is a Governor, or whatever it 's called—and he got special terms for her. She was rather old, you know, to go to school, but he arranged it very nicely for her—and there is such a good boys' college there, it seemed the wisest thing to send Alfred too. Julia is to finish at Christmas-time—and what I 'm going to do with her afterward is more than I know."

"Is she pretty?" the uncle of Julia enquired.

"She 's very nice," the mother answered, with vague extenuation in her tone. "I don't know about her looks—she varies so much. Sometimes I think she 's pretty—and then again I can't think it. She 's got good features, and she holds herself well, and she 's very much the lady—rather too much, I think, sometimes—but it all depends upon what you call pretty. She 's not tall, you know. She takes after her father's family. The Dabneys are all little people."

Thorpe seemed not to care about the Dabneys. "And what 's Alfred like?" he asked.

"He wants to be an artist!" There was a perceptible note of apprehension in the mother's confession.

"Well—why should n't he—if he 's got a bent that way?" demanded Thorpe, with reproof in his tone. "Did you want him to be a shop-keeper?"

"I should like to see him a doctor," she replied with dignity. "It was always my idea for him."

"Well, it 's no good—even as an idea," he told her. "Doctors are like parsons—they can't keep up with the times. The age is outgrowing them. Only the fakirs in either profession get anything out of it, nowadays. It 's all mystery and sleight-of-hand and the confidence trick—medicine is—and if you have n't got just the right twist of the wrist, you 're not in it. But an artist stands on his merits. There is his work—done by his own hands. It speaks for itself. There 's no deception—it 's easy enough to tell whether it 's good or bad. If the pictures are good, people buy them. If they 're bad, people don't buy them. Of course, it won't matter to Alfred, financially speaking, whether his pictures sell well or not. But probably he 'd give it up, if he did n't make a hit of it.

"I don't know that there 's any crying need that he should do anything. My own idea for him, perhaps, would be the Army, but I would n't dream of forcing it on him against his will. I had a bitter enough dose of that, myself, with father. I 'd try to guide a youngster, yes, and perhaps argue with him, if I thought he was making a jack of himself—but I would n't dictate. If Alfred thinks he wants to be an artist, in God's name let him go ahead. It can be made a gentlemanly trade—and the main thing is that he should be a gentleman."

Louisa had listened to this discourse with apathetic patience. "If you don't mind, I don't know that I do," she said when it was finished. "Perhaps he would n't have made a good doctor; he 's got a very quick temper. He reminds me of father—oh, ever so much more than you do. He contradicts everything everybody says. He quite knows it all."

"But he 's a good fellow, is n't he?" urged Thorpe. "I mean, he 's got his likable points? I 'm going to be able to get along with him?"

"I did n't get along with him very well," the mother admitted, reluctantly, "but I daresay with a man it would be different. You see, his father was ill all those four years, and Alfred hated the shop as bad as you did, and perhaps in my worry I blamed him more than was fair. I want to be fair to him, you know."

"But is he a gentleman? That puts it in a word," Thorpe insisted.

"Oh, mercy yes," Louisa made ready answer. "My only fear is—whether you won't find him too much of a gentleman."

Thorpe knitted his brows. "I only hope we 're talking about the same thing," he said, in a doubtful tone. Before she could speak, he lifted his hand. "Never mind—I can see for myself in ten minutes more than you could tell me in a lifetime. I 've got a plan. I 'm going on the Continent in a few days' time, to stay for three or four months. I 've got nothing special to do—just to travel about and see things and kill time—I shall probably go to Italy and Switzerland and Paris and the Rhine and all sorts of places—and it occurred to me that I 'd take the two youngsters with me. I could get acquainted with them, that way, and they 'd be company for me. I 've been lonesome so long, it would feel good to have some

of my own flesh and blood about me—and I suppose they 'd be tickled to death to go."

"Their schooling and board are paid for up to Christmas," Mrs. Dabney objected, blankly.

"Bah!" Thorpe prolonged the emphatic exclamation into something good-natured, and ended it with an abrupt laugh. "What on earth difference does that make? I could go and buy their damned colleges, and let the kids wear them for breastpins if I wanted to. You said the girl was going to quit at Christmas in any case. Won't she learn more in four months travelling about on the Continent, than she would trotting around in her own tracks there at Cheltenham?

"And it 's even more important for the boy. He 's of an age when he ought to see something of the world, and I ought to see something of him. Whatever he 's going to do, it 's time that he began getting his special start for it." He added, upon a luminous afterthought: "Perhaps his seeing the old Italian picture galleries and so on will cure him of wanting to be an artist."

The mother's air displayed resigned acquiescence rather than conviction. "Well—if you really think it 's best," she began, "I don't know that I ought to object. Goodness knows, I don't want to stand in their way. Ever since you sent that four hundred pounds, it has n't seemed as if they were my children at all. They 've scarcely listened to me. And now you come, and propose to take them out of my hands altogether—and all I can say is—I hope you feel entirely justified. And so, shall I write them to come home? When do you think of starting? Julia ought to have some travelling clothes."

"I can wait till you get her ready—only you must hurry up about it."

Remembering something, he took out his cheque-book,

and spread it on the desk. "I will give you back that thirty," he said, as he wrote, "and here 's a hundred to get the youngsters ready. You won't waste any time, will you? and if you want more tell me."

A customer had entered the shop, and Thorpe made it the occasion for leaving.

His sister, looking after her brother with the cheque in her hand, was conscious of a thought which seemed to spell itself out in visible letters before her mental vision. "Even now I don't believe in him," the impalpable legend ran.

CHAPTER IX

GENERAL KERVICK was by habit a punctual man, and Thorpe found him hovering, carefully gloved and fur-coated, in the neighbourhood of the luncheon-room when he arrived. It indeed still lacked a few minutes of the appointed hour when they thus met and went in together. They were fortunate enough to find a small table out on the balcony, sufficiently removed from any other to give privacy to their conversation.

By tacit agreement, the General ordered the luncheon, speaking French to the waiter throughout. Divested of his imposing great-coat, he was seen to be a gentleman of meagre flesh as well as of small stature. He had the Roman nose, narrow forehead, bushing brows, and sharply-cut mouth and chin of a soldier grown old in the contemplation of portraits of the Duke of Wellington. His face and neck were of a dull reddish tint, which seemed at first sight uniformly distributed: one saw afterward that it approached pallor at the veined temples, and ripened into purple in minute patches on the cheeks and the tip of the pointed nose. Against this flushed skin, the closely-cropped hair and small, neatly-waxed moustache were very white indeed. It was a thin, lined, care-worn face, withal, which in repose, and particularly in profile, produced an effect of dignified and philosophical melancholy. The General's over-prominent light blue eyes upon occasion marred this effect, however, by glances of a bold, harsh character, which seemed to disclose un-

pleasant depths below the correct surface. His manner with the waiters was abrupt and sharp, but undoubtedly they served him very well—much better, in truth, than Thorpe had ever seen them serve anybody before.

Thorpe observed his guest a good deal during the repast, and formed numerous conclusions about him. He ate with palpable relish of every dish, and he emptied his glass as promptly as his host could fill it. There was hardly a word of explanation as to the purpose of their meeting, until the coffee was brought, and they pushed back their chairs, crossed their legs, and lighted cigars.

"I was lucky to catch you with my wire, at such short notice," Thorpe said then. "I sent two, you know—to your chambers and your club. Which of them found you?"

"Chambers," said the General. "I rarely dress till luncheon time. I read in bed. There 's really nothing else to do. Idleness is the curse of my life."

"I 've been wondering if you 'd like a little occupation —of a well-paid sort," said Thorpe slowly. He realized that it was high time to invent some pretext for his hurried summons of the General.

"My dear sir," responded the other, "I should like anything that had money in it. And I should very much like occupation, too—if it were, of course, something that was—was suitable to me."

"Yes," said Thorpe, meditatively. "I 've something in my mind—not at all definite yet—in fact, I don't think I can even outline it to you yet. But I 'm sure it will suit you—that is, if I decide to go on with it—and there ought to be seven or eight hundred a year for you in it—for life, mind you."

The General's gaze, fastened strenuously upon Thorpe,

shook a little. "That will suit me very well," he declared, with feeling. "Whatever I can do for it"—he let the sentence end itself with a significant gesture.

"I thought so," commented the other, trifling with the spoon in his cup. "But I want you to be open with me. I 'm interested in you, and I want to be of use to you. All that I 've said, I can do for you. But first, I 'm curious to know everything that you can tell me about your circumstances. I 'm right in assuming, I suppose, that you 're—that you 're not any too well-fixed."

The General helped himself to another little glass of brandy. His mood seemed to absorb the spirit of the liqueur. "Fixed!" he repeated, with a peevish snap in his tone. "I 'm not 'fixed' at all, as you call it. Good God, sir! They no more care what becomes of me than they do about their old gloves. I gave them name and breeding and position—and everything—and they round on me like—like cuckoos." His pale, bulging eyes lifted their passionless veil for an instant as he spoke, and flashed with the predatory fierceness of a hawk.

Intuition helped Thorpe to guess whom "they" might mean. The temper visibly rising in the old man's mind was what he had hoped for. He proceeded with an informed caution. "Don't be annoyed if I touch upon family matters," he said. "It 's a part of what I must know, in order to help you. I believe you 're a widower, are n't you, General?"

The other, after a quick upward glance, shook his head resentfully. "Mrs. Kervick lives in Italy with *her* son-in-law—and her daughter. He is a man of property—and also, apparently, a man of remarkable credulity and patience." He paused, to scan his companion's face. "They divide him between them," he said then, from clenched teeth—"and I—mind you—*I* made the match! He was

a young fellow that *I* found—and *I* brought him home and introduced him—and I have n't so much as an Italian postage-stamp to show for it. But what interest can you possibly take in all this ? " The unamiable glance of his eyes was on the instant surcharged with suspicion.

" How many daughters have you ? " Thorpe ventured the enquiry with inward doubts as to its sagacity.

" Three," answered the General, briefly. It was evident that he was also busy thinking.

" I ask because I met one of them in the country over Sunday," Thorpe decided to explain.

The old soldier's eyes asked many questions in the moment of silence. " Which one—Edith ?—that is, Lady Cressage ? " he enquired. " Of course—it would have been her."

Thorpe nodded. " She made a tremendous impression upon me," he observed, watching the father with intentness as he let the slow words fall.

" Well she might," the other replied, simply. " She 's supposed to be the most beautiful woman in England."

" Well—I guess she is," Thorpe assented, while the two men eyed each other.

" Is the third sister unmarried ? " it occurred to him to ask. The tone of the question revealed its perfunctory character.

" Oh—Beatrice—she 's of no importance," the father replied. " She goes in for writing, and all that—she 's not a beauty, you know—she lives with an old lady in Scotland. The oldest daughter—Blanche—she has some good looks of her own, but she 's a cat. And so you met Edith ! May I ask where it was ? "

" At Hadlow House—Lord Plowden's place, you know."

The General's surprise at the announcement was un-

doubted. "At Plowden's!" he repeated, and added, as if half to himself, "I thought that was all over with, long ago."

"I wish you 'd tell me about it," said Thorpe, daringly. "I 've made it plain to you, have n't I? I 'm going to look out for you. And I want you to post me up, here, on some of the things that I don't understand. You remember that it was Plowden who introduced you to me, don't you? It was through him that you got on the Board. Well, certain things that I 've seen lead me to suppose that he did that in order to please your daughter. Did you understand it that way?"

"It 's quite likely, in one sense," returned the General. He spoke with much deliberation now, weighing all his words. "He may have thought it would please her; he may not have known how little my poor affairs concerned her."

"Well, then," pursued Thorpe, argumentatively, "he had an object in pleasing her. Let me ask the question—did he want to marry her?"

"Most men want to marry her," was the father's non-committal response. His moustache lifted itself in the semblance of a smile, but the blue eyes above remained coldly vigilant.

"Well—I guess that 's so too," Thorpe remarked. He made a fleeting mental note that there was something about the General which impelled him to think and talk more like an American than ever. "But was *he* specially affected that way?"

"I think," said Kervick, judicially, "I think it was understood that if he had been free to marry a penniless wife, he would have wished to marry her."

"Do you know," Thorpe began again, with a kind of diffident hesitation—"do you happen to have formed an

idea—supposing that had been the case—would she have accepted him?"

"Ah, there you have me," replied the other. "Who can tell what women will accept, and what they will refuse? My daughter refused Lord Lingfield—and he is an Under-Secretary, and will be Earl Chobham, and a Cabinet Minister, and a rich man. After that, what are you to say?"

"You speak of her as penniless," Thorpe remarked, with a casual air.

"Six hundred a year," the father answered. "We could have rubbed along after a fashion on it, if she had had any notions at all of taking my advice. I 'm a man of the world, and I could have managed her affairs for her to her advantage, but she insisted upon going off by herself. She showed not the slightest consideration for me—but then I am accustomed to that."

Thorpe smiled reflectively, and the old gentleman read in this an encouragement to expand his grievances.

"In my position," he continued, helping himself to still another tiny glass, "I naturally say very little. It is not my form to make complaints and advertise my misfortunes. I daresay it 's a fault. I know it kept me back in India—while ever so many whipper-snappers were promoted over my head—because I was of the proud and silent sort. It was a mistake, but it was my nature. I might have put by a comfortable provision for my old age, in those days, if I had been willing to push my claims, and worry the Staff into giving me what was my due. But that I declined to do—and when I was retired, there was nothing for me but the ration of bread and salt which they serve out to the old soldier who has been too modest. I served my Queen, sir, for forty years—and I should be ashamed to tell you the allowance she makes me in my old age.

But I do not complain. My mouth is closed. I am an English gentleman and one of Her Majesty's soldiers. That 's enough said, eh? Do you follow me? And about my family affairs, I 'm not likely to talk to the first comer, eh? But to you I say it frankly—they 've behaved badly, damned badly, sir.

" Mrs. Kervick lives in Italy, at the cost of *her* son-in-law. He has large estates in one of the healthiest and most beautiful parts; he has a palace, and more money than he knows what to do with—but it seems that he 's not *my* son-in-law. I could do with Italy very well—but that does n't enter into anyone's calculations. No! let the worn-out old soldier sell boot-laces on the kerb! That 's the spirit of woman-kind. And my daughter Edith—does she care what becomes of me? Listen to me—I secured for her the very greatest marriage in England. She would have been Duchess of Glastonbury today if her husband had not played the fool and drowned himself."

" What 's that you say?" put in Thorpe, swiftly.

" It was as good as suicide," insisted the General, with doggedness. His face had become a deeper red. " They did n't hit it off together, and he left in a huff, and went yachting with his father, who was his own sailing-master—and, as might be expected, they were both drowned. The title would have gone to her son—but no, of course, she had no son—and so it passed to a stranger—an outsider that had been an usher in a school, or something of that sort. You can fancy what a blow this was to me. Instead of being the grandfather of a Duke, I have a childless widow thrust back upon my hands! Fine luck, eh? And then, to cap all, she takes her six hundred a year and goes off by herself, and gives me the cold shoulder completely. What is it Shakespeare says? 'How sharper than a serpent's teeth '——"

Thorpe brought his fist down upon the table with an emphasis which abruptly broke the quotation in half. He had been frowning moodily at his guest for some minutes, relighting his cigar more than once meanwhile. He had made a mental calculation of what the old man had had to drink, and had reassured himself as to his condition. His garrulity might have an alcoholic basis, but his wits were clear enough. It was time to take a new line with him.

"I don't want to hear you abuse your daughter," he admonished him now, with a purpose glowing steadily in his firm glance. "Damn it all, why should n't she go off by herself, and take care of her own money her own way? It 's little enough, God knows, for such a lady as she is. Why should you expect her to support you out of it? No—sit still! Listen to me!"—he stretched out his hand, and laid it with restraining heaviness upon the General's arm—"you don't want to have any row with me. You can't afford it. Just think that over to yourself—you—can't—afford—it."

Major-General Kervick's prominent blue eyes had bulged forth in rage till their appearance had disconcerted the other's gaze. They remained still too much in the foreground, as it were, and the angry scarlets and violets of the cheeks beneath them carried an unabated threat of apoplexy—but their owner, after a moment's silence, made a sign with his stiff white brows that the crisis was over. "You must remember that—that I have a father's feelings," he gasped then, huskily.

Thorpe nodded, with a nonchalance which was not wholly affected. He had learned what he wanted to know about this veteran. If he had the fierce meannesses of a famished old dog, he had also a dog's awe of a stick. It was almost too easy to terrorize him.

"Oh, I make allowances for all that," Thorpe began, vaguely. "But it 's important that you should understand me. I 'm this sort of a man : whatever I set out to do, and put my strength into it, that I do ! I kill every pheasant I fire at ; Plowden will tell you that ! It 's a way I have. To those that help me, and are loyal to me, I 'm the best friend in the world. To those that get in my way, or try to trip me up, I 'm the devil—just plain devil. Now then—you 're getting three hundred a year from my Company, that is to say from *me*, simply to oblige my friend Plowden. You don't do anything to earn this money ; you 're of no earthly use on the Board. If I chose, I could put you off at the end of the year as easily as I can blow out this match. But I propose not only to keep you on, but to make you independent. Why do I do that ? You should ask yourself that question. It can't be on account of anything you can do for the Company. What else then ? Why, first and foremost, because you are the father of your daughter."

"Let me tell you the kind of man I am," said the General, inflating his chest, and speaking with solemnity.

"Oh, I know the kind of man you are," Thorpe interrupted him, coolly. "*I* want to talk now."

"It was merely," Kervick ventured, in an injured tone, "that I can be as loyal as any man alive to a true friend."

"Well, I 'll be the true friend, then," said Thorpe, with impatient finality. "And now this is what I want to say. I 'm going to be a very rich man. You 're not to say so to anybody, mind you, until the thing speaks for itself. We 're keeping dark for a few months, d' ye see ?—lying low. Then, as I say, I shall be a very rich man. Well now, I would n't give a damn to be rich, un-

less I did with my money the things that I wanted to do, and got the things with it that I wanted to get. Whatever takes my fancy, that 's what I 'll do."

He paused for a moment, mentally to scrutinize a brand-new project which seemed, by some surreptitious agency, to have already taken his fancy. It was a curious project ; there were attractive things about it, and objections to it suggested themselves as well.

" I may decide," he began speaking again, still revolving this hypothetical scheme in his thoughts—" I may want to—well, here 's what occurs to me as an off-chance. I take an interest in your daughter, d' ye see ? and it seems a low-down sort of thing to me that she should be so poor. Well, then—I might say to you, here 's two thousand a year, say, made over to you in your name, on the understanding that you turn over half of it, say, to her. She could take it from you, of course, as her father. You could say you made it out of the Company. Of course it might happen, later on, that I might like to have a gentle hint dropped to her, d' ye see, as to where it really came from. Mind, I don't say this is what is going to be done. It merely occurred to me."

After waiting for a moment for some comment, he added a second thought : " You 'd have to set about making friends with her, you know. In any case, you 'd better begin at that at once."

The General remained buried in reflection. He lighted a cigarette, and poured out for himself still another *petit verre*. His pursed lips and knitted brows were eloquent of intense mental activity.

" Well, do you see any objections to it ? " demanded Thorpe, at last.

" I do not quite see the reasons for it," answered the other, slowly. " What would you gain by it ? "

"How do you mean—gain?" put in the other, with peremptory intolerance of tone.

General Kervick spread his hands in a quick little gesture. These hands were withered, but remarkably well-kept. "I suppose one does n't do something for nothing," he said. "I see what I would gain, and what she would gain, but I confess I don't see what advantage you would get out of it."

"No-o, I daresay you don't," assented Thorpe, with sneering serenity. "But what does that matter? You admit that you see what *you* would gain. That 's enough, is n't it?"

The older man's veined temples twitched for an instant. He straightened himself in his chair, and looked hard at his companion. There was a glistening of moisture about his staring eyes.

"It surely is n't necessary—among gentlemen"—he began, cautiously picking his phrases—"to have quite so much that 's unpleasant, is it?"

"No—you 're right—I did n't mean to be so rough," Thorpe declared, with spontaneous contrition. Upon the instant, however, he perceived the danger that advantage might be taken of his softness. "I 'm a plain-spoken man," he went on, with a hardening voice, "and people must take me as they find me. All I said was, in substance, that I intended to be of service to you—and that that ought to interest you."

The General seemed to have digested his pique. "And what I was trying to say," he commented deferentially, "was that I thought I saw ways of being of service to you. But that did not seem to interest you at all."

"How—service?" Thorpe, upon consideration, consented to ask.

"I know my daughter so much better than you do,"

explained the other; "I know Plowden so much better; I am so much more familiar with the whole situation than you can possibly be—I wonder that you won't listen to my opinion. I don't suggest that you should be guided by it, but I think you should hear it."

"I think so, too," Thorpe declared, readily enough. "What *is* your opinion?"

General Kervick sipped daintily at his glass, and then gave an embarrassed little laugh. "But I can't form what you might call an opinion," he protested, apologetically, "till I understand a bit more clearly what it is you propose to yourself. You must n't be annoyed if I return to that—'still harping on my daughter,' you know. If I *must* ask the question—is it your wish to marry her?"

Thorpe looked blankly at his companion, as if he were thinking of something else. When he spoke, it was with no trace of consciousness that the question had been unduly intimate.

"I can't in the least be sure that I shall ever marry," he replied, thoughtfully. "I may, and I may not. But—starting with that proviso—I suppose I have n't seen any other woman that I 'd rather think about marrying than—than the lady we 're speaking of. However, you see it 's all in the air, so far as my plans go."

"In the air be it," the soldier acquiesced, plausibly. "Let us consider it as if it were in the air—a possible contingency. This is what I would say—My—'the lady we are speaking of' is by way of being a difficult lady—'uncertain, coy, and hard to please' as Scott says, you know—and it must be a very skilfully-dressed fly indeed which brings her to the surface. She 's been hooked once, mind, and she has a horror of it. Her husband was the most frightful brute and ruffian, you know. I was strongly opposed to the marriage, but her mother carried it through.

But—yes—about her—I think she is afraid to marry again. If she does ever consent, it will be because poverty has broken her nerve. If she is kept on six hundred a year, she may be starved, so to speak, into taking a husband. If she had sixteen hundred—either she would never marry at all, or she would be free to marry some handsome young pauper who caught her fancy. That would be particularly like her. You would be simply endowing some needy fellow, beside losing her for yourself. D' ye follow me? If you 'll leave it to me, I can find a much better way than that—better for all of us."

"Hm!" said Thorpe, and pondered the paternal statement. "I see what you mean," he remarked at last. "Yes—I see."

The General preserved silence for what seemed a long time, deferring to the reverie of his host. When finally he offered a diversion, in the form of a remark about the hour, Thorpe shook himself, and then ponderously rose to his feet. He took his hat and coat from the waiter, and made his way out without a word.

At the street door, confronting the waning foliage of the Embankment garden, Kervick was emboldened to recall to him the fact of his presence. "Which way are you going?" he asked.

"I don't know," Thorpe answered absently. "I think —I think I 'll take a walk on the Embankment—by myself."

The General could not repress all symptoms of uneasiness. "But when am I to see you again?" he enquired, with an effect of solicitude that defied control.

"See me?" Thorpe spoke as if the suggestion took him by surprise.

"There are things to be settled, are there not?" the other faltered, in distressed doubt as to the judicious tone

to take. "You spoke, you know, of—of some employment that—that would suit me."

Thorpe shook himself again, and seemed by an effort to recall his wandering attention. "Oh yes," he said, with lethargic vagueness—"I have n't thought it out yet. I 'll let you know—within the week, probably."

With the briefest of nods, he turned and crossed the road. Walking heavily, with rounded shoulders and hands plunged deep in his overcoat pockets, he went through the gateway, and chose a path at random. To the idlers on the garden benches who took note of him as he passed, he gave the impression of one struggling with nausea. To his own blurred consciousness, he could not say which stirred most vehemently within him, his loathing for the creature he had fed and bought, or his bitter self-disgust.

The General, standing with exaggerated exactness upon the doorstep, had followed with his bulging eyes the receding figure. He stood still regarding the gateway, mentally summarizing the events of the day, after the other had vanished. At last, nestling his chin comfortably into the fur of his collar, he smiled with self-satisfaction. "After all," he said to himself, "there are always ways of making a cad feel that he is a cad, in the presence of a gentleman."

CHAPTER X

ON a Sunday afternoon, early in February, Thorpe journeyed with his niece and nephew from Bern to Montreux.

The young people, with maps and a guide-book open, sat close together at the left side of the compartment. The girl from time to time rubbed the steam from the window with a napkin out of the lunch-basket. They both stared a good deal through this window, with frequent exclamations of petulance.

"Is n't it too provoking!" cried the girl, turning to her uncle at last. "This is where we are now—according to Baedeker: 'As the train proceeds we enjoy a view of the Simmen-Thal and Freiburg mountains to the left, the Moléson being conspicuous.' And look at it! For all one can see, we might as well be at Redhill."

"It is pretty hard luck," Thorpe assented, passively glancing past her at the pale, neutral-tinted wall of mist which obscured the view. "But hang it all—it must clear up some time. Just you have patience, and you 'll see some Alps yet."

"Where we 're going," the young man interposed, "the head-porter told me it was always cloudier than anywhere else."

"I don't think that can be so," Thorpe reasoned, languidly, from his corner. "It 's a great winter resort, I 'm told, and it rather stands to reason, does n't it? that people would n't flock there if it was so bad as all that."

"The kind of people we 've seen travelling in Switzerland," said the girl—"they would do anything."

Thorpe smiled, with tolerant good humour. "Well, you can comfort yourself with the notion that you 'll be coming again. The mountains 'll stay here, all right," he assured her. The young people smiled back at him, and with this he rearranged his feet in a new posture on the opposite seat, lighted another cigar, and pillowed his head once more against the hard, red-plush cushion. Personally, he did not in the least resent the failure of the scenery.

For something more than three months, this purposeless pleasure-tour had been dragging him about from point to point, sleeping in strange beds, eating extraordinarily strange food, transacting the affairs of a sight-seer among people who spoke strange languages, until he was surfeited with the unusual. It had all been extremely interesting, of course, and deeply improving—but he was getting tired of talking to nobody but waiters, and still more so of having nothing to do which he could not as well leave undone if he chose.

After a few days more of Switzerland—for they had already gazed with blank faces at this universal curtain of mist from such different points of view as Lucerne, Interlaken, and Thun—it was clear to him that they would, as he phrased it, to himself, make a break for home. Unless, indeed, something happened at Montreux. Ah, would anything happen at Montreux? For four days his mind had been automatically reverting to that question; it lurked continually in the background of his thoughts, now, as he smoked and idly ruminated, on his way southward through the fog.

All the rest of the prolonged trip had been without any specific motive, so far as he was concerned. The youngsters

had planned all its routes and halts and details of time and connections, and he had gone along, with cheerful placidity, to look at the things they bade him observe, and to pay the bills. Perhaps in all things their tastes had not been his tastes. He would have liked more of Paris, he fancied, and less of the small Dutch and North German towns which they seemed to fancy so much. Still, the beer was good—and really their happiness, as a spectacle, had given him more satisfaction than a thousand miles of boulevards could have done.

He liked this niece and nephew of his more than he could ever have imagined himself liking any young people. They had been shy with him at the outset—and for the first week his experiment had been darkened by the belief that, between themselves, they did not deem him quite good enough. He had been wise enough, then, to have it out with the girl—she was the one to whom he felt it easiest to talk frankly—and had discovered, to his immense relief, that they conceived him to be regarding them as encumbrances. At breakfast next morning, with tactful geniality, he set everything right, and thereafter they were all extremely happy together.

So far as he could judge, they were very superior young people, both intellectually and spiritually. The girl spoke French, and her brother German, with what seemed to him remarkable proficiency. Their young minds were the repositories of an astounding amount of information: they knew who Charles the Bold was; they pointed out to their uncle the distinction between Gothic and Romanesque arches; they explained what was the matter with the Anabaptists; they told him that the story of the Bishop and the rats at Bingen was a baseless myth, and that probably there had never been any such man as William Tell. Nor did they get all this out of the guide-

books which they pored over with such zest. It was impossible not to see that they were familiar with large numbers of the subjects that these books discussed, and that the itinerary which they marked out had reference to desires and interests that they had cultivated for themselves.

Julia, upon even first sight, made a much pleasanter impression than her mother's hesitating description had prepared him for. As he came to know her well, he ceased to remember that there was a question in any mind as to her being a pretty girl. There was less colour in her face than he could have wished. Her smooth, pallid skin, almost waxen in texture, had a suggestion of delicate health which sometimes troubled him a little, but which appealed to the tenderness in his nature all the time. The face was unduly thin, perhaps, but this, and the wistful glance of the large grey eyes in repose, made up an effect that Thorpe found touched him a good deal. Even when she was in visibly high spirits, the look in these eyes seemed to him to be laying claim to his protection. She could be merry upon occasion, in a gentle and tranquil way, and as her self-confidence expanded under the shelter of their growing intimacy, she disclosed to her uncle plenty of initiative and individuality—but what he felt in her most was a peculiarly sweet and girlish trustfulness, which made him like himself more than he had ever done before. He could feel that he was at his very best—a hitherto unsuspected best—when Julia was about. He wanted to buy for her everything in the windows upon which she bestowed the most casual approving glance. It was a delight merely to look at her, and to meditate upon the felicity of being able to do things for so charming a girl.

Alfred made a less direct demand upon his uncle's ad-

miration, but he was a very good fellow all round. He was big and fair and muscular, and nothing about him but his spectacles seemed in Thorpe's mind to be related to his choice of art as a profession. That so robust and hearty a young fellow should wish to put paint on a canvas with small brushes, was to the uncle an unaccountable thing. It was almost as if he had wanted to knit, or do embroidery. Of the idleness and impatience of discipline which his mother had seemed to allege against him, Thorpe failed to detect any signs. The young man was never very late in the morning, and, beside his tireless devotion to the task of hunting up old pictures in out-of-the-way places, did most of the steward's work of the party with intelligence and precision. He studied the time-tables, audited the hotel-bills, looked after the luggage, got up the street-maps of towns and the like, to such good purpose that they never lost a train, or a bag, or themselves. Truly, an excellent young man. Thorpe noted with especial satisfaction his fine, kindly big-brother attitude toward his sister Julia—and it was impossible for him to avoid the conviction that Louisa was a simpleton not to appreciate such children. They did not often allude to their mother ; when they did, it was in language the terms of which seemed more affectionate than the tone—and Thorpe said often to himself that he did not blame them. It was not so much that they had outgrown their mother's point of view. They had never occupied it.

The journey, so far as Thorpe comprehended its character, had been shaped with about equal regard for Julia's interest in the romance of history, and Alfred's more technical and practical interest in art. Each had sufficient sympathy with the tastes of the other, however, to prevent any tendency to separation. They took their

uncle one day to see where William the Silent was assassinated, and the next to observe how Rembrandt's theory of guild portrait-painting differed from Van der Helst's, with a common enthusiasm. He scrutinized with patient loyalty everything that they indicated to him, and not infrequently they appeared to like very much the comments he offered. These were chiefly of a sprightly nature, and when Julia laughed over them he felt that she was very near to him indeed.

Thus they saw Paris together—where Thorpe did relinquish some of the multiplied glories of the Louvre to sit in front of a café by the Opera House and see the funny people go past—and thence, by Bruges and Antwerp, to Holland, where nobody could have imagined there were as many pictures as Thorpe saw with his own weary eyes. There were wonderful old buildings at Lubeck for Julia's eyes to glisten over, and pictures at Berlin, Dresden, and Dusseldorf for Alfred.

The assumption existed that the excursion into the Thuringenwald to see the memorials of Luther was especially for the uncle's benefit, and he tried solicitously to say or look nothing which might invalidate it. There were other places in Germany, from Mainz to Munich, which he remembered best by their different beers. They spent Christmas at Vienna, where Julia had heard that its observance was peculiarly insisted upon, and then they saw the Tyrol in its heaviest vesture of winter snows, and beautiful old Basle, where Alfred was crazier about Holbein than he had been at Munich over Brouwer. Thorpe looked very carefully at the paintings of both men, and felt strengthened in his hopes that when Alfred got a little older he would see that this picture business was not the thing for a young gentleman with prospects to go into.

It was at Basle that Thorpe received a letter from London which directly altered the plans of the party. He had had several other letters from London which had produced no such effect. Through Semple, he had followed in outline the unobtrusive campaign to secure a Special Settlement, and had learned that the Stock Exchange Committee, apparently without opposition, had granted one for the first week in February.

Even this news, tremendously important as it was, did not prompt Thorpe to interfere with the children's projects. There was no longer any point in remaining away from London ; there were, indeed, numerous reasons for a prompt return. But he was loth to deprive the youngsters of that descent into smiling, sunlit Italy upon which they had so fondly dwelt in fancy, and after all Semple could do all that was needful to be done for another month.

So they went to Basle, and here it was that another kind of letter came. It was in a strange hand, at once cramped and fluttering, which puzzled the recipient a good deal ; it was a long time before even the signature unravelled itself. Then he forced himself to decipher it, sentence by sentence, with a fierce avidity. It was from General Kervick.

The next morning Thorpe astonished his young companions by suggesting an alteration in their route. In a roundabout and tentative fashion—in which more suspicious observers must have detected something shamefaced—he mentioned that he had always heard a great deal about Montreux as a winter-resort. The fact that he called it Montroox raised in Julia's mind a fleeting wonder from whom it could be that he had heard so much about it, but it occurred to neither her nor her brother to question his entire good faith. Their uncle had displayed,

hitherto, a most comforting freedom from discrimination among European towns; he had, indeed, assured them many times that they were all one to him. That he should suddenly turn up now with a favourite winter-resort of his own selection surprised them considerably, but, upon reflection, it also pleased them. He had humoured all their wishes with such unfailing and bountiful kindness, that it was a delight to learn that there was something he wanted to do. They could not finish their breakfast till the guide-book had been brought to the table.

"Oh! How splendid!" Julia had cried then. "The Castle of Chillon is there!"

"Why of course!" said Thorpe, complacently.

They laughed gayly at him for pretending that he had known this, and he as good-humouredly accepted their banter. He drew a serious long breath of relief, however, when their backs were turned. It had gone off much better than he had feared.

Now, on this Sunday afternoon, as the train made its sure-footed way across the mountains, the thought that he was actually to alight at Montreux at once fascinated and depressed him. He was annoyed with himself for suffering it to get such a hold upon his mind. What was there in it, anyway? There was a big hotel there, and he and his youngsters were to stop at it, and if he accidentally encountered a certain lady who was also stopping there—and of course the meeting would bear upon its face the stamp of pure chance—what of it?

And if he did meet her, thus fortuitously—what would happen then? No doubt a lady of her social position met abroad great numbers of people that she had met at home. It would not in any way surprise her—this chance encounter of which he thought so much. Were there sufficient grounds for imagining that it would even inter-

est her? He forced his mind up to this question, as it were, many times, and invariably it shied and evaded the leap.

There had been times, at Hadlow House, when Lady Cressage had seemed supremely indifferent to the fact of his existence, and there had been other times when it had appeared manifest that he pleased her—or better, perhaps, that she was willing to take note of how much she pleased him. It must have been apparent to her—this fact that she produced such an impression upon him. He reasoned this out satisfactorily to himself. These beautiful women, trained from childhood for the conquest of a rich husband, must have cultivated an extraordinary delicacy of consciousness, in such matters. They must have developed for themselves what might be called a sixth sense—a power of feeling in the air what the men about were thinking of them. More than once he had caught a glimmer of what he felt to be the operation of this sense, in the company of Lady Cressage. He could not say that it had been discernible in her glance, or her voice, or her manner, precisely, but he was sure that he had seen it, somehow.

But even assuming all this—admitting that in October, on a wet Sunday, in the tedium of a small country house party, she had shown some momentary satisfaction in the idea that he was profoundly impressed by her—did it at all follow that in February, amid the distractions of a fashionable winter-resort, and probably surrounded by hosts of friends, she would pay any attention to him whatever? The abject fear that she might not even remember him—might not know him from Adam when he stood before her—skulked about in the labyrinths of his mind, but he drove it back whenever it showed itself. That would be too ignominious.

The young people at the other side of the compartment, forever wiping the window with the napkin, and straining their eyes to see the invisible, diverted his unsettled attention. A new perception of how much he liked them and enjoyed having them with him, took hold of his thoughts. It had not occurred to him before, with any definiteness, that he would be insupportably lonely when the time came to part with them.

Now, when he dwelt upon it, it made him feel sad and old.

He said to himself at once, with decision, that there need be no parting at all. He would take a house without delay, and they should live with him. He could not doubt that this would be agreeable to them; it would solve every problem for him.

His fancy sketched out the natural and legitimate extensions of this project. There would be, first of all, a house in town—a furnished house of a modest sort, having no pretension save to provide a cheerful temporary shelter for three people who liked one another. Here the new household would take shape, and get its right note of character. Apparently Louisa would not be urged to form part of this household. He said to himself with frankness that he did n't want her, and there had been nothing to indicate that her children would pine for her. She showed good sense when she said that her place was in the shop, and in her ancestral home over the shop. No doubt there would be a certain awkwardness, visible to others if not to themselves, about her living in one part of London and her children in another. But here also her good sense would come on;—and, besides, this furnished house in town would be a mere brief overture to the real thing—the noble country mansion he was going to have, with gardens and horses and hounds and arti-

ficial lakes and deer parks and everything. Quite within the year he would be able to realize this consummation of his dreams.

How these nice young people would revel in such a place—and how they would worship him for having given it to them for a home! His heart warmed within him as he thought of this. He smiled affectionately at the picture Julia made, polishing the glass with vehement circular movements of her slight arm, and then grimacing in comic vexation at the deadly absence of landscape outside. Was there ever a sweeter or more lovable girl in this world? Would there have to be some older woman to manage the house, at the beginning? he wondered. He should like it immensely if that could be avoided. Julia looked fragile and inexperienced—but she would be twenty-one next month. Surely that was a mature enough age for the slight responsibility of presiding over servants who should be the best that money could buy. Many girls were married, and given households of their own to manage, when they were even younger.

This reflection raised an obstacle against the smooth-flowing current of his thoughts. Supposing that Julia got the notion of marrying—how miserable that would make everything. Very likely she would never do any such thing; he had observed in her no shadow of a sign that a thought of matrimony had ever crossed her brain. Yet that was a subject upon which, of course, she could not be asked to give pledges, even to herself.

Thorpe tried to take a liberal view of this matter. He argued to himself that there would be no objection at all to incorporating Julia's husband into the household, assuming that she went to the length of taking one, and that he was a good fellow. On this latter point, it was only the barest justice to Julia's tastes and judgment to

take it for granted that he would be a good fellow. Yet the uncle felt uneasily that this would alter things for the worse. The family party, with that hypothetical young man in it, could never be quite so innocently and completely happy as—for instance—the family party in this compartment had been during these wonderful three months.

Mechanically he rubbed the window beside him, and turned to look out with a certain fixedness—as if he might chance to catch a glimpse of the bridegroom with whom Julia would have it in her power to disturb the serenity of their prospective home. A steep white cliff, receding sullenly against the dim grey skyline ; a farmhouse grotesquely low for its size, crouching under big shelving galleries heaped with snow ; an opening in front, to the right, where vaguely there seemed to be a valley into which they would descend—he saw these things. They remained in his mind afterward as a part of something else that he saw, with his mental vision, at the same moment—a strikingly real and vivid presentment of Lady Cressage, attired as he had seen her in the saddle, her light hair blown about a little under her hat, a spot of colour in the exquisite cheek, the cold, impersonal dignity of a queen in the beautiful profile.

The picture was so actual for the instant that he uttered an involuntary exclamation—and then looked hastily round to see whether his companions had heard it. Seemingly they had not ; he lolled again upon the comfortless cushion, and strove to conjure up once more the apparition. Nothing satisfactory came of the effort. Upon consideration, he grew uncertain as to whether he had seen anything at all. At the most it was a kind of half-dream which had visited him. He yawned at the thought, and lighted a fresh cigar. All at once, his mind

had become too indolent to do any more thinking. A shapeless impression that there would be a good many things to think over later on flitted into his brain and out again.

"Well, how are the mountains using you, now?" he called out to his niece.

"Oh, I could shake them!" she declared. "Listen to this: 'A view of singular beauty, embracing the greater part of the Lake of Geneva, and the surrounding mountains, is suddenly disclosed.' That 's where we are now—or were a minute ago. You can see that there is some sort of valley in front of us—but that is all. If I could only see one mountain with snow on it——"

"Why, it 's all mountains and all snow, when you come to that," Thorpe insisted, with jocose perversity. "You 're on mountains yourself, all the time."

"You know what I mean," she retorted. "I want to see something like the coloured pictures in the hotels."

"Oh, probably it will be bright sunlight tomorrow," he said, for perhaps the twentieth time that day.

"There—that looks like water!" said Alfred. "See?—just beyond the village. Yes, it is water. There 's your Lake of Geneva, at all events."

"But it is n't the right colour," protested Julia, peering through the glass. "It 's precisely like everything else: it 's of no colour at all. And they always paint it such a lovely blue! Really, uncle, the Swiss Government ought to return you your money."

"You wait till you see it tomorrow—or next day," said the uncle, vaguely. He closed his eyes, and welcomed a drowsy mood. As he went off to sleep, the jolting racket of the train mellowed itself into a murmur of "tomorrow or next day, tomorrow or next day," in his ears.

CHAPTER XI

FROM their windows, high up and at the front of the big hotel, Julia looked down upon the Lake of Geneva. She was in such haste to behold it that she had not so much as unbuttoned her gloves ; she held her muff still in her hand. After one brief glance, she groaned aloud with vexation.

Beyond the roadway, and the deserted miniature pier of Territet, both dishevelled under melting and mud-stained snow, there lay a patch of water—motionless, inconspicuous, of a faded drab colour—which at some small distance out vaguely ceased to look like water and, yet a little further out, became part and parcel of the dull grey mist. Save for the forlorn masts of a couple of fishing boats, beached under the shelter of the pier, there was no proof in sight that this was a lake at all. It was as uninspiring to the eye as a pool of drippings from umbrellas in a porch.

While her uncle and brother occupied themselves with the luggage being brought up by the porters, she opened a window and stepped out upon the tiny balcony. A flaring sign on the inner framework of this balcony besought her in Swiss-French, in the interests of order, not to feed the birds. The injunction seemed meaningless to her until she perceived, over by the water, several gulls lazily wheeling about. They were almost as grey as the fog they circled in. Suddenly they seemed to perceive her in turn, and, swerving sharply, came floating toward the

hotel, with harsh, almost menacing cries. She hurried in, and shut the window with decision. It seemed to her that the smile with which, as she turned, she was able to meet her uncle's look, was a product of true heroism.

Apparently this smile did not altogether delude him. "Oh, now, you must n't get down on your luck," he adjured her. "We 're going to be awfully cozy here. Have you seen your room? It 's just there, in a little alley to the right of the door. They say it has an even finer view than these windows. Oh, you need n't laugh —this is the best view in the world, I 'm told by those who know. And as a winter-resort, why——"

"I say, look here!" The interruption came from Alfred, who, having gone out on one of the balconies, put in his head now to summon them. "Come here! Here 's some fun."

He pointed out to Thorpe the meaning of the inscription on the sign, and then pulled him forward to observe its practical defiance. A score of big gulls were flapping and dodging in excited confusion close before them, filling their ears with a painful clamour. Every now and again, one of the birds, recovering its senses in the hurly-burly, would make a curving swoop downward past the rows of windows below, and triumphantly catch in its beak something that had been thrown into the air.

Thorpe, leaning over his railing, saw that a lady on a balcony one floor below, and some yards to the left, was feeding the birds. She laughed aloud as she did so, and said something over her shoulder to a companion who was not visible.

"Well, that 's pretty cool," he remarked to his niece, who had come to stand beside him. "She 's got the same sign down there that we 've got. I can see it from here. Or perhaps she can't read French."

"Or perhaps she is n't frightened of the hotel people," suggested the girl. She added, after a little, "I think I 'll feed them myself in the morning. I certainly shall if the sun comes out—as a sort of Thanksgiving festival, you know."

Her uncle seemed not to hear her. He had been struck by the exceptional grace of the gestures with which the pieces of bread were flung forth. The hands and wrists of this lady were very white and shapely. The movements which she made with them, all unaware of observation as she was, and viewed as he viewed them from above, were singularly beautiful in their unconstraint. It was in its way like watching some remarkably fine dancing, he thought. He could not see much of her face, from his perch, but she was tall and fashionably clad. There was a loose covering of black lace thrown over her head, but once, as she turned, he could see that her hair was red. Even in this fleeting glimpse, the unusual tint attracted his attention : there was a brilliancy as of fire in it. Somehow it seemed to make a claim upon his memory. He continued to stare down at the stranger with an indefinable sense that he knew something about her.

Suddenly another figure appeared upon the balcony—and in a flash he comprehended everything. These idiotic, fighting gluttons of gulls had actually pointed out to him the object of his search. It was Lady Cressage who stood in the doorway, there just below him—and her companion, the red-haired lady who laughed hotel-rules to scorn, was the American heiress who had crossed the ocean in his ship, and whom he had met later on at Hadlow. What was her name—Martin ? No—Madden. He confronted the swift impression that there was something odd about these two women being together. At Hadlow he had imagined that they did not like each

other. Then he reflected as swiftly that women probably had their own rules about such matters. He seemed to have heard, or read, perhaps, that females liked and disliked each other with the most capricious alternations and on the least tangible of grounds. At all events, here they were together now. That was quite enough.

The two ladies had gone in, and closed their window. The sophisticated birds, with a few ungrateful croaks of remonstrance, had drifted away again to the water. His niece had disappeared from his elbow. Still Thorpe remained with his arms folded on the railing, his eyes fixed on the vacant balcony, below to the left.

When at last he went inside, the young people were waiting for him with the project of a stroll before dinner. The light was failing, but there was plenty of time. They had ascertained the direction in which Chillon lay; a servant had assured them that it was only a few minutes' walk, and Alfred was almost certain that he had seen it from the window.

Thorpe assented with a certain listlessness, which they had never noted in his manner before, but when Julia begged him not to stir if he were in the slightest degree tired, he replied honestly enough that he would do anything rather than be left alone. Then, of course, they said, there should be no walk, but to this he would not listen. The party trooped downstairs, accordingly, and out into the street. The walking was vile, but, as Julia had long ago said, if they were to be deterred by slush they would never get anywhere or see anything.

It proved to be too late and too dark to either enter the castle or get much of an idea of its exterior. Returning, they paused again to look into the lighted window of the nice little book-shop. The numerous photographs of what

they were entitled to behold from the windows of their hotel seemed more convincing than photographs usually were. As the young people inspected them, they became reassured. It was not credible that such a noble vista would forever deny itself to such earnest pilgrims. When their uncle introduced this time his ancient formula about the certainty of brilliant sunshine in the morning, they somehow felt like believing him.

"Yes—I really think it must change," Julia declared, with her fascinated glance upon the photographs.

Alfred looked at his watch. "We 'd better get along to the hotel, had n't we?" he suggested.

"By the way"—Thorpe began, with a certain uneasiness of manner—"speaking of dinner, would n't you like to dine at the big *table d'hôte*, instead of up in our sitting-room?"

"If you 're tired of our dining alone—by all means," answered Julia, readily. There was obvious surprise, however, in both her look and tone.

"Tired nothing!" he assured her. "I like it better than anything else in the world. But what I mean is—I was thinking, seeing that this is such a great winter-resort, and all the swagger people of Europe come here—that probably you youngsters would enjoy seeing the crowd."

Julia's glance, full of affectionate appreciation, showed how wholly she divined his spirit of self-sacrifice. "We would n't care in the least for it," she declared. "We enjoy being a little party by ourselves every whit as much as you do—and we both hate the people you get at *table d'hôtes*—and besides, for that matter, if there are any real swells here, you may be sure they dine in their own rooms."

"Why, of course!" Thorpe exclaimed swiftly, in palpa-

ble self-rebuke. "I don't know what I could have been thinking of. Of course they would dine in their rooms."

Next morning, Thorpe rose earlier than ever—with the impression of a peculiarly restless and uncomfortable night behind him. It was not until he had shaved and dressed that he noted the altered character of the air outside. Although it was not fully daylight yet, he could see the outlines of the trees and vinerows on the big, snow-clad hill, which monopolized the prospect from his window, all sharp and clear cut, as if he were looking at them through an opera-glass. He went at once to the sitting-room, and thrust the curtains aside from one of the windows.

A miracle had been wrought in the night. The sky overhead was serenely cloudless; the lake beneath, stirring softly under some faint passing breeze, revealed its full breadth with crystalline distinctness. Between sky and water there stretched across the picture a broad, looming, dimly-defined band of shadow, marked here and there at the top by little slanting patches of an intensely glowing white. He looked at this darkling middle distance for a moment or two without comprehension. Then he turned and hurriedly moved to the door of Julia's room and beat upon it.

"Get up!" he called through the panels. "Here 's your sunrise—here 's your Alpine view. Go to your window and see it!"

A clear voice, not unmirthful, replied: "I 've been watching it for half an hour, thanks. Is n't it glorious?"

He was more fortunate at the opposite door, for Alfred was still asleep. The young man, upon hearing the news, however, made a toilet of unexampled brevity, and came breathlessly forth. Thorpe followed him to the balcony, where he stood collarless and uncombed, with the fresh morning breeze blowing his hair awry, his lips parted,

his eyes staring with what the uncle felt to be a painful fixedness before him.

Thorpe had seen many mountains in many lands. They did not interest him very much. He thought, however, that he could see now why people who had no mountains of their own should get excited about Switzerland. He understood a number of these sentimental things now, for that matter, which had been Greek to him three months before. Unreceptive as his philistinism may have seemed to these delightful youngsters, it was apparent enough to him that they had taught him a great deal. If he could not hope to share their ever-bubbling raptures and enthusiasms, at least he had come to comprehend them after a fashion, and even to discern sometimes what it was that stirred them.

He watched his nephew now—having first assured himself by a comprehensive downward glance that no other windows of the hotel-front were open. The young man seemed tremendously moved, far too much so to talk. Thorpe ventured once some remarks about the Mexican mountains, which were ever so much bigger, as he remembered them, but Alfred paid no heed. He continued to gaze across the lake, watching in rapt silence one facet after another catch the light, and stand out from the murky gloom, radiantly white, till at last the whole horizon was a mass of shining minarets and domes, and the sun fell full on his face. Then, with a long-drawn sigh, he turned, re-entered the room, and threw himself into a chair.

"It 's too good!" he declared, with a half-groan. "I did n't know it would be like that."

"Why nothing 's too good for us, man," his uncle told him.

"*That* is," said the boy, simply, and Thorpe, after

staring for a moment, smiled and rang the bell for breakfast.

When Julia made her appearance, a few minutes later, the table was already laid, and the waiter was coming in with the coffee.

"I thought we 'd hurry up breakfast," her uncle explained, after she had kissed him and thanked him for the sunrise he had so successfully predicted—"because I knew you 'd both be crazy to get out."

He had not over-estimated their eagerness, which was so great, indeed, that they failed to note the excessive tranquility of his own demeanour. He ate with such unusual deliberation, on this exciting morning, that they found themselves at the end of their repast when, apparently, he had but made a beginning.

"Now you must n't wait for me at all," he announced to them then. "I 'm a little tired this morning—and I think I 'd just like to lie around and smoke, and perhaps read one of your novels. But you two must get your things on and lose no time in getting out. This is the very best time of day, you know—for Alpine scenery. I 'd hate to have you miss any of it."

Under his kindly if somewhat strenuous insistence, they went to their rooms to prepare for an immediate excursion. He was so anxious to have them see all there was to be seen that, when Julia returned, properly cloaked and befurred, and stood waiting at the window, he scolded a little.

"What on earth is that boy doing?" he exclaimed, with a latent snarl in his tone which was novel to her ear. "He 'll keep you here till noon!"

"He 's shaving, I think. He won't be long," she replied, with great gentleness. After a moment's pause, she turned from the window and came gayly forward.

"Oh, I forgot: I was going to feed the birds. There are several of them out there now." As she spoke, she busily broke up some of the rolls on the table. Her face was bright with the pleasure of the thought.

"If you don't much mind, Julia," her uncle began, with almost pleading intonations, "I rather think I would n't feed those birds. The rule is there before our eyes, you know—and it 's always been my idea that if you 're at a hotel it 's the correct thing to abide by its rules. It 's just an idea of mine—and I daresay, if you think about it, you 'll feel the same way."

The girl freed the last remaining bread-crumb from her gloves. "Why, of course, uncle," she said, with promptitude.

Although there was no hint of protest in her tone or manner, he felt impelled to soften still further this solitary demonstration of his authority. "You see I 've been all round the world, my little girl," he explained, haltingly, "and when a man 's done that, and knocked about everywhere, he 's apt to get finicking and notional about trifles every once in a while."

"You 're less so than anybody I ever knew," she generously interposed.

"Oh, no I 'm not. You don't know me well enough yet; that 's what 's the matter. And you see, Julia—another thing—just because you saw that lady throwing out bread, that aint a very good reason why you should do it. You don't know what kind of a person she may be. Girls have got to be so frightfully careful about all that sort of thing."

Julia offered a constrained little laugh in comment. "Oh, you don't know how careful I can be," she said.

"But you 're not annoyed?" he entreated her—and for answer she came behind him, and rested an arm on

his shoulder, and patted it. He stroked her hand with his own. "That's something like the nicest niece in the world!" he exclaimed, with fervour.

When at last she and her brother had gone, he made short work of his breakfast, and drank his coffee at a gulp. A restless activity suddenly informed his movements. He lit a cigar, and began pacing up and down the room, biting his lips in preoccupation as he went. After a little, he opened a window, and ventured cautiously as far out on the balcony as was necessary to obtain a view of the street below. Eventually, he identified his nephew and niece among the pedestrians beneath him, and he kept them in sight till, after more than one tiresome halt at a shop window, they disappeared round a bend in the road. Then he turned and came back into the room with the buoyant air of a man whose affairs are prospering.

He smiled genially to himself as he gathered from the table in one capacious hand all the pieces of bread his beloved niece had broken up, and advanced again to the open window. Waiting here till one of the dingy gulls moving aimlessly about was headed toward him, he tossed out a fragment. The bird dashed at it with a scream, and on the instant the whole squawking flock were on wing. He suffered the hubbub to proceed unappeased for a little, while he kept a watchful though furtive eye on that balcony to the left, below. Unhappily he could not get out far enough to see whether the inner curtains of its window were drawn. He threw another bit of bread, and then looked at his watch. It was a few minutes past nine. Surely people travelling to see scenery would be up by this hour.

The strategy of issuing just enough bread to keep the feathered concourse in motion commended itself to his mind. As a precautionary measure, he took all the rolls

remaining on the table, and put them in the drawer of a desk by the window. It even occurred to him to ring for more bread, but upon consideration that seemed too daring. The waiter would be sufficiently surprised at the party's appetites as it was.

Half an hour later, his plan of campaign suddenly yielded a victory. Lady Cressage appeared on her balcony, clad in some charming sort of morning gown, and bareheaded. She had nothing in her hands, and seemed indifferent to the birds, but when Thorpe flung forth a handful of fragments into the centre of their whirling flock, she looked up at him. It was the anxious instant, and he ventured upon what he hoped was a decorous compromise between a bow and a look of recognition.

She was in no haste to answer either. He could see rather than hear that she said something to her invisible companion within, the while she glanced serenely in the general direction of his balcony. It seemed to him that the answer to her remark, whatever it was, must have exerted a direct influence upon his destiny, for Lady Cressage all at once focussed her vague regard upon him, and nodded with a reasonably gracious smile.

"It 's wonderful luck to find you here," he called down to her. Having played their part, he wished now that the birds were at Jericho. Their obstreperous racket made conversation very difficult. Apparently she made him an answer, but he could catch nothing of it.

"I 'm here with my niece and nephew," he shouted down. "I don't hear what you say. May I come down and pay my respects—later on? What is your number, and when may I come?"

These questions, as he flashed them in review through his mind, seemed to be all right from the most exacting social point of view. Doubtless it was equally all right

that, before replying, she should consult her companion, as she did at some length. Then she replied—and he had no difficulty now in hearing her above the birds—that it would be very nice of him to come, say, in an hour's time. She told him the number—and then almost abruptly went in.

Thorpe, during this hour that ensued, smoked with volcanic energy. He tried to interest himself in one after another of half a dozen Tauchnitz novels his niece carried about, with a preposterous absence of success. He strove to arrange in some kind of sequence the things that he should say, when this momentous interview should begin, but he could think of nothing which did not sound silly. It would be all right, he argued to himself in the face of this present mental barrenness; he always talked well enough on the spur of the moment, when the time came—and still was not reassured.

He wondered if both ladies would be there to receive him, and decided that they would probably regard that as indispensable to the proprieties. In that case, their conversation would necessarily be of the most casual and general character. He would tell them a good deal about his niece, he foresaw. A man travelling about with a niece—and such a delightfully lady-like and engaging little niece—would take on some added interest and dignity, he perceived, in the eyes of ladies travelling alone. He essayed to estimate just how much they would probably like Julia. Of course he would say nothing about her mother and the book-shop; a vague allusion to a widowed sister would be ample on that head. But there could be confident references to Cheltenham; he knew from what Julia had said that it suggested the most satisfactory social guarantees, if taken strictly by itself. And then so much would depend upon Julia herself! If she succeeded in striking up

a friendship with them—ah, then everything would be all right. Perhaps they would take a fancy to Alfred too! He was a boy, of course, but conceivably the fact that he wanted to paint, and knew about pictures, would appeal to them. He seemed to have heard somewhere that artists were the very devil among women.

At last the weary time of waiting had worn itself out, somehow, and, after a final polishing before his glass, he went down, and found his right corridor, and knocked at the door. A pleasant voice bade him enter, and, hat and gloves in hand, he went in.

As he had imagined, both ladies were present. He had not been prepared, however, for the fact that it was the American who played the part of hostess. It was she who received him, and invited him to sit down, and generally made him free of the apartment. When he shook hands with Lady Cressage, there was somehow an effect of the incidental in the ceremony, as if she were also a guest.

Nothing could have been simpler or more pleasing than the little visit turned out to be. Miss Madden had suddenly grown tired of the snowless and dripping English winter, and had as promptly decided to come to Switzerland, where the drifts ought to be high enough, and the frosts searching enough, in all conscience. They had selected Territet, because it was familiar to her, and because it was on the way to Martigny and Brieg, and she had had a notion of crossing either the Simplon or the St. Bernard in winter. As she found now, the St. Bernard was quite impracticable, but admittedly a post road was kept open over the Simplon. It was said now that she would not be allowed to proceed by this, but it often happened that she did the things that she was not allowed to do. The hotel-people at both Brieg and Berisal had writ-

ten refusing to let their horses attempt the Simplon journey, and they were of course quite within their rights, but there were other horses in Switzerland. One surely could buy horses—and so on.

Thorpe also had his turn at autobiography. He told rather whimsically of his three months' experiences at the tail of the juvenile whirligigs, and his auditors listened to them with mild smiles. He ventured upon numerous glowing parentheses about Julia, and they at least did not say that they did not want to know her. They heard with politeness, too, what he could contrive to drag in about his artist-nephew, and said it must be very pleasant for him to have such nice company. At least Miss Madden said this : her companion, as he thought it over afterward, seemed hardly to have said anything at all. She answered the few remarks which he found it possible to direct to her, but the responses took no hold upon his memory. He fancied that she was bored, or unhappy, or both.

Finally, in the midst of commonplaces which, to his apprehension, were verging upon flatness, a bold inspiration disclosed itself—as splendid as the Dent du Midi revealing its glaciers above the mounting sunrise—in his brain.

"We should all be charmed if you would come up and dine with us tonight," he said, under the abrupt impulsion of this idea. "It 's been such an age since we wanderers have had the privilege of company at our table!"

The felicity of these phrases from his lips attracted his admiring attention, even while he waited in suspense for an answer to them.

The ladies exchanged a look. "Yes," said Miss Madden, after the slightest of pauses, "we shall be very happy."

Shortly thereafter Thorpe took his leave, and went downstairs and out. He wandered about till luncheon time, observing the mountains across the lake from various standpoints, and, as it were, with new eyes. He was interested in them in a curious new fashion ; they seemed to say things to him. His lip curled once at the conceit that he was one of the Alps himself.

CHAPTER XII

IT did not happen until three days later that Thorpe's opportunity to speak alone with Lady Cressage came.

In this brief period, the two parties seemed to have become fused in a remarkable intimacy. This was clearly due to the presence of the young people, and Thorpe congratulated himself many times each day upon the striking prescience he had shown in bringing them.

Both the ladies unaffectedly liked Julia; so much so that they seemed unwilling to make any plans which did not include her. Then it was only a matter of course that where she went her brother should go—and a further logical step quite naturally brought in their willing uncle. If he had planned everything, and now was ordering everything, it could not have gone more to his liking.

Certain side speculations lent a savour to the satisfaction with which he viewed this state of affairs. He found many little signs to confirm the suspicion that the two ladies had been the readier to make much of Julia because they were not over-keen about each other's society. The bright, sweet-natured girl had come as a welcome diversion to a couple who in seclusion did battle with tendencies to yawn. He was not quite convinced, for that matter, that the American lady always went to that trouble. She seemed to his observation a wilful sort of person, who would not be restrained by small ordinary considerations from doing the things she wanted to do. Her relations with her companion afforded him food for much thought. With-

out any overt demonstrations, she produced the effect of ordering Lady Cressage about. This, so far as it went, tended to prejudice him against her. On the other hand, however, she was so good to Julia, in a peculiarly frank and buoyant way which fascinated the girl, that he could not but like her. And she was very good to Alfred too.

There was, indeed, he perceived, a great deal of individuality about the friendship which had sprung up between Miss Madden and his nephew. She was years his senior —he settled it with himself that the American could not be less than seven-and-twenty,—yet Alfred stole covert glances of admiration at her, and seemed to think of nothing but opportunities for being in her company as if—as if—Thorpe hardly liked to complete the comparison in his own thoughts. Alfred, of course, said it was all on account of her wonderful hair ; he rather went out of his way to dilate upon the enthusiasm her "colour scheme" —whatever that might mean—excited in him as an artist. The uncle had moments of profound skepticism about this —moments when he uneasily wondered whether it was not going to be his duty to speak to the young man. For the most part, however, he extracted reassurance from Miss Madden's demeanour toward the lad. She knew, it seemed, a vast deal about pictures ; at least she was able to talk a vast deal about them, and she did it in such a calmly dogmatic fashion, laying down the law always, that she put Alfred in the position of listening as a pupil might listen to a master. The humility with which his nephew accepted this position annoyed Thorpe upon occasion, but he reasoned that it was a fault on the right side. Very likely it would help to keep the fact of the lady's seniority more clearly before the youngster's mind, and that would be so much gained.

And these apprehensions, after all, were scarcely to be

counted in the balance against the sense of achieved happiness with which these halcyon days kept Thorpe filled. The initiatory dinner had gone off perfectly. He could have wished, indeed, that Julia had a smarter frock, and more rings, when he saw the imposing costumes and jewelled throats and hands of his guests—but she was a young girl, by comparison, he reflected, and there could be no doubt that they found her charming. As for Alfred, he was notably fine-looking in his evening-clothes—infinitely more like the son of a nobleman, the gratified uncle kept saying to himself, than that big dullard, the Honourable Balder. It filled him with a new pleasure to remember that Alfred had visiting cards presenting his name as D'Aubigny, which everybody of education knew was what the degenerate Dabney really stood for. The lad and his sister had united upon this excellent change long ago at Cheltenham, and oddly enough they had confessed it to their uncle, at the beginning of the trip, with a show of trepidation, as if they feared his anger. With radiant gayety he had relieved their minds by showing them his card, with "Mr. Stormont Thorpe" alone upon it. At the dinner table, in the proudest moment of his life, he had made himself prouder still by thinking how distinguished an appearance his and Alfred's cards would make together in the apartment below next day.

But next day, the relations between the two parties had already become too informal for cards. Julia went down to see them; they came up to see Julia. Then they all went for a long walk, with luncheon at Vevey, and before evening Alfred was talking confidently of painting Miss Madden. Next day they went by train to St. Maurice, and, returning after dark, dined without ceremony together. This third day—the weather still remaining bright—they had ascended by the funicular road to Glion,

and walked on among the swarming luegers, up to Caux. Here, after luncheon, they had wandered about for a time, regarding the panorama of lake and mountains. Now, as the homeward descent began, chance led the two young people and Miss Madden on ahead.

Thorpe found himself walking beside Lady Cressage. He had upon his arm her outer wrap, which she said she would put on presently. To look at the view he must glance past her face: the profile, under the graceful fur cap, was so enriched by glowing colour that it was, to his thought, as if she were blushing.

"How little I thought, a few months ago," he said, "that we should be mountaineering together!"

"Oh, no one knows a day ahead," she responded, vaguely. "I had probably less notion of coming to Switzerland then than you had."

"Then you don't come regularly?"

"I have never seen either Germany or Switzerland before. I have scarcely been out of England before."

"Why now"—he paused, to think briefly upon his words—"I took it for granted you were showing Miss Madden around."

"It 's quite the other way about," she answered, with a cold little laugh. "It is she who is showing me around. It is her tour. I am the chaperone."

Thorpe dwelt upon the word in his mind. He understood what it meant only in a way, but he was luminously clear as to the bitterness of the tone in which it had been uttered.

"No—it did n't seem as if it were altogether—what I might call—*your* tour," he ventured. They had seen much of each other these past few days, but it was still hard for him to make sure whether their freedom of intercourse had been enlarged.

The slight shrug of the shoulders with which, in silence, she commented upon his remark, embarrassed him. For a moment he said nothing. He went on then with a renewed consciousness of risk.

"You must n't be annoyed with me," he urged. "I 've been travelling with that dear little niece of mine and her brother, so long, that I 've got into a habit of watching to notice if the faces I see round me are happy. And when they 're not, then I have a kind of fatherly notion of interfering, and seeing what 's wrong."

She smiled faintly at this, but when he added, upon doubtful inspiration—"By the way, speaking of fathers, I did n't know at Hadlow that you were the daughter of one of my Directors"—this smile froze upon the instant.

"The Dent du Midi is more impressive from the hotel, don't you think?" she remarked, "than it is from here."

Upon consideration, he resolved to go forward. "I have taken a great interest in General Kervick," he said, almost defiantly. "I am seeing to it that he has a comfortable income—an income suitable to a gentleman of his position—for the rest of his life."

"He will be very glad of it," she remarked.

"But I hoped that you would be glad of it too," he told her, bluntly. A curious sense of reliance upon his superiority in years had come to him. If he could make his air elderly and paternal enough, it seemed likely that she would defer to it. "I 'm talking to you as I would to my niece, you know," he added, plausibly.

She turned her head to make a fleeting survey of his face, as if the point of view took her by surprise. "I don't understand," she said. "You are providing an income for my father, because you wish to speak to me like an uncle. Is that it?"

He laughed, somewhat disconsolately. "No—that

is n't it," he said, and laughed again. " I could n't tell, you know, that you would n't want to talk about your father."

" Why, there 's no reason in the world for not talking of him," she made haste to declare. " And if he 's got something good in the City, I 'm sure I 'm as glad as anyone. He is the sort that ought always to have a good deal of money. I mean, it will bring out his more amiable qualities. He does not shine much in adversity—any more than I do."

Thorpe felt keenly that there were fine things to be said here—but he had confidence in nothing that came to his tongue. " I 've been a poor man all my life—till now," was his eventual remark.

" Please don't tell me that you have been very happy in your poverty," she adjured him, with the dim flicker of a returning smile. " Very likely there are people who are so constituted, but they are not my kind. I don't want to hear them tell about it. To me poverty is the horror—the unmentionable horror ! "

" There never was a day that I did n't feel *that !* " Thorpe put fervour into his voice. " I was never reconciled to it for a minute. I never ceased swearing to myself that I 'd pull myself out of it. And that 's what makes me sort of soft-hearted now toward those—toward those who have n't pulled themselves out of it."

" Your niece says you are soft-hearted beyond example," remarked Lady Cressage.

" Who could help being, to such a sweet little girl as she is ? " demanded the uncle, fondly.

" She is very nice," said the other. " If one may say such a thing, I fancy these three months with her have had an appreciable effect upon you. I 'm sure I note a difference."

"That 's just what I 've been saying to myself!" he told her. He was visibly delighted with this corroboration. "I 've been alone practically all my life. I had no friends to speak of—I had no fit company—I had n't anything but the determination to climb out of the hole. Well, I 've done that—and I 've got among the kind of people that I naturally like. But then there came the question of whether they would like me. I tell you frankly, that was what was worrying the heart out of me when I first met you. I like to be confessing it to you now—but you frightened me within an inch of my life. Well now, you see, I 'm not scared of you at all. And of course it 's because Julia 's been putting me through a course of sprouts."

The figure was lost upon Lady Cressage, but the spirit of the remarks seemed not unpleasant to her. "I 'm sure you 're full of kindness," she said. "You must forget that I snapped at you—about papa."

"All I remember about that is," he began, his eye lighting up with the thought that this time the opportunity should not pass unimproved, "that you said he did n't shine much in adversity—any more than you did. Now on that last point I disagree with you, straight. There would n't be any place in which you would n't shine."

"Is that the way one talks to one 's niece?" she asked him, almost listlessly. "Such flattery must surely be bad for the young." Her words were sprightly enough, but her face had clouded over. She had no heart for the banter.

"Ah"—he half-groaned. "I only wish I knew what was the right way to talk to you. The real thing is that I see you 're unhappy—and that gets on my nerve—and I should like to ask you if there was n't something I could

do—and ask it in such a way that you 'd have to admit there was—and I don't know enough to do it."

He had a wan smile for thanks. "But of course there is nothing," she replied, gently.

"Oh, there must be!" he insisted. He had no longer any clear notions as to where his tongue might not lead him. "There must be! You said I might talk to you as I would to Julia——"

"Did I?"

"Well, I 'm going to, anyway," he went on stoutly, ignoring the note of definite dissent in her interruption. "You *are* unhappy! You spoke about being a chaperone. Well now, to speak plainly, if it is n't entirely pleasant for you with Miss Madden—why would n't you be a chaperone for Julia? I must be going to London very soon—but she can stay here, or go to Egypt, or wherever she likes—and of course you would do everything, and have everything—whatever you liked, too."

"The conversation is getting upon rather impossible grounds, I 'm afraid," she said, and then bit her lips together. Halting, she frowned a little in the effort of considering her further words, but there was nothing severe in the glance which she lifted to him as she began to speak. "Let us walk on. I must tell you that you misconceive the situation entirely. Nobody could possibly be kinder or more considerate than Miss Madden. Of course she is American—or rather Irish-American, and I 'm English, and our notions and ways are not always alike. But that has nothing to do with it. And it is not so much that she has many thousands a year, and I only a few hundreds. That in itself would signify nothing—and if I must take help from somebody I would rather take it from Celia Madden than anybody else I know—but this is the point, Mr. Thorpe: I do not eat the bread

of dependence gracefully. I pull wry faces over it, and I don't try very much to disguise them. That is my fault. Yes—oh yes, I know it is a fault—but I am as I am. And if Miss Madden does n't mind—why"—she concluded with a mirthless, uncertain laugh—"why on earth should you?"

"Ah, why should I?" he echoed, reflectively. "I should like desperately to tell you why. Sometime I will tell you."

They walked on in silence for a brief space. Then she put out her hand for her wrap, and as she paused, he spread it over her shoulders.

"I am amazed to think what we have been saying to each other," she said, buttoning the fur as they moved on again. "I am vexed with myself."

"And more still with me," he suggested.

"No-o—but I ought to be. You 've made me talk the most shocking rubbish."

"There we disagree again, you know. Everything you 've said 's been perfect. What you 're thinking of now is that I 'm not an old enough friend to have been allowed to hear it. But if I 'm not as old a friend as some, I wish I could make you feel that I 'm as solid a friend as any—as solid and as staunch and as true. I wish I could hear you say you believed that."

"But you talk of 'friends,'" she said, in a tone not at all responsive—"what is meant by 'friends'? We 've chanced to meet twice—and once we barely exchanged civilities, and this time we 've been hotel acquaintances—hardly more, is it?—and you and your young people have been very polite to me—and I in a silly moment have talked to you more about my affairs than I should—I suppose it was because you mentioned my father. But 'friends' is rather a big word for that, is n't it?"

Thorpe pouted for a dubious moment. "I can think of a bigger word still," he said, daringly. "It 's been on the tip of my tongue more than once."

She quickened her pace. The air had grown perceptibly colder. The distant mountains, visible ever and again through the bare branches, were of a dark and cheerless blue, and sharply defined against the sky. It was not yet the sunset hour, and there were no mists, but the light of day seemed to be going out of the heavens. He hurried on beside her in depressed silence.

Their companions were hidden from view in a convolution of the winding road, but they were so near that their voices could be heard as they talked. Frequently the sound of laughter came backward from them.

"They 're jolly enough down there," he commented at last, moodily.

"That 's a good reason for our joining them, is n't it?" Her tone was at once casual and pointed.

"But I don't want to join them!" he protested. "Why don't you stay with me—and talk?"

"But you bully me so," she offered in explanation.

The phrase caught his attention. Could it be that it expressed her real feeling? She had said, he recalled, that he had made her talk. Her complaint was like an admission that he could overpower her will. If that were true—then he had resources of masterfulness still in reserve sufficient to win any victory.

"No—not bully you," he said slowly, as if objecting to the word rather than the idea. "That would n't be possible to me. But you don't know me well enough to understand me. I am the kind of man who gets the things he wants. Let me tell you something: When I was at Hadlow, I had never shot a pheasant in my life. I used to do tolerably well with a rifle, but I hardly knew

anything about a shot-gun, and I don't suppose I 'd ever killed more than two or three birds on the wing—and that was ages ago. But I took the notion that I would shoot better than anybody else there. I made up my mind to it—and I simply did it, that 's all. I don't know if you remember—but I killed a good deal more than both the others put together. I give you that as an example. I wanted you to think that I was a crack shot—and so I made myself be a crack shot."

"That is very interesting," she murmured. They did not seem to be walking quite so fast.

"Don't think I want to brag about myself," he went on. "I don't fancy myself—in that way. I 'm not specially proud of doing things—it 's the things themselves that I care for. If some men had made a great fortune, they would be conceited about it. Well, I 'm not. What I 'm keen about is the way to use that fortune so that I will get the most out of it—the most happiness, I mean. The thing to do is to make up your mind carefully what it is that you want, and to put all your power and resolution into getting it—and the rest is easy enough. I don't think there 's anything beyond a strong man's reach, if he only believes enough in himself."

"But are n't you confusing two things?" she queried. The subject apparently interested her. "To win one's objects by sheer personal force is one thing. To merely secure them because one's purse is longer than other people's—that 's quite another matter."

He smiled grimly at her. "Well, I 'll combine the two," he said.

"Then I suppose you will be altogether irresistible," she said, lightly. "There will be no pheasants left for other people at all."

"I don't mind being chaffed," he told her, with

gravity. "So long as you 're good-natured, you can make game of me all you like. But I 'm in earnest, all the same. I 'm not going to play the fool with my money and my power. I have great projects. Sometime I 'll tell you about them. They will all be put through—every one of them. And you would n't object to talking them over with me—would you?"

"My opinion on 'projects' is of no earthly value—to myself or anyone else."

"But still you 'd give me your advice if I asked it?" he persisted. "Especially if it was a project in which you were concerned?"

After a moment's constrained silence she said to him, "You must have no projects, Mr. Thorpe, in which I am concerned. This talk is all very wide of the mark. You are not entitled to speak as if I were mixed up with your affairs. There is nothing whatever to warrant it."

"But how can you help being in my projects if I put you there, and keep you there?" he asked her, with gleeful boldness. "And just ask yourself whether you do really want to help it. Why should you? You 've seen enough of me to know that I can be a good friend. And I 'm the kind of friend who amounts to something—who can and will do things for those he likes. What obligation are you under to turn away that kind of a friend, when he offers himself to you? Put that question plainly to yourself."

"But you are not in a position to nominate the questions that I am to put to myself," she said. The effort to import decision into her tone and manner was apparent. "That is what I desire you to understand. We must not talk any more about me. I am not the topic of conversation."

"But first let me finish what I wanted to say," he in-

sisted. "My talk won't break any bones. You 'd be wrong not to listen to it—because it 's meant to help you —to be of use to you. This is the thing, Lady Cressage : You 're in a particularly hard and unpleasant position. Like my friend Plowden "—he watched her face narrowly but in vain, in the dull light, for any change at mention of the name—"like my friend Plowden you have a position and title to keep up, and next to nothing to keep it up on. But he can go down into the City and make money—or try to. He can accept Directorships and tips about the market and so on, from men who are disposed to be good to him, and who see how he can be of use to them—and in that way he can do something for himself. But there is the difference : *you* can't do these things, or you think you can't, which is the same thing. You 're all fenced in ; you 're surrounded by notice-boards, telling you that you must n't walk this way or look that way ; that you must n't say this thing or do the other. Now your friend down ahead there—Miss Madden—she does n't take much stock in notice-boards. In fact, she feeds the gulls, simply because she 's forbidden to do it. But *you*— you don't feed any gulls, and yet you 're annoyed with yourself that you don't. Is n't that the case ? Have n't I read you right ? "

She seemed to have submitted to his choice of a topic. There was no touch of expostulation in the voice with which she answered him. "I see what you think you mean," she said.

"Think ! " he responded, with self-confident emphasis. "I 'm not 'thinking.' I 'm reading an open book. As I say, you 're not contented—you 're not happy ; you don't try to pretend that you are. But all the same, though you hate it, you accept it. You think that you really must obey your notice-boards. Now what I tell

you you ought to do is to take a different view. Why should you put up all this barbed wire between yourself and your friends? It does n't do anybody else any good —and it does *you* harm. Why, for example, should Plowden be free to take things from me, and you not?"

She glanced at him, with a cold half-smile in her eye. "Unfortunately I was not asked to join your Board."

He pressed his lips tightly together, and regarded her meditatively as he turned these words over in his mind. "What I 'm doing for Plowden," he said with slow vagueness meanwhile, "it is n't so much because he 's on the Board. He 's of no speci[illegible]se to me there. But he was nice to me at a time when that meant everything in the world to me—and I don't forget things of that sort. Besides, I like him—and it pleases me to let him in for a share of my good fortune. See? It 's my way of enjoying myself. Well now, I like you too, and why should n't I be allowed to let you in also for a share of that good fortune? You think there 's a difference, but I tell you it 's imaginary—pure moonshine. Why, the very people whose opinion you 're afraid of—what did they do themselves when the South African craze was on? I 'm told that the scum of the earth had only to own some Chartered shares, and pretend to be 'in the know' about them—and they could dine with as many duchesses as they liked. I knew one or two of the men who were in that deal—I would n't have them in my house—but it seems there was n't any other house they could n't go to in London."

"Oh yes, there were many houses," she interposed. "It was n't a nice exhibition that society made of itself—one admits that,—but it was only one set that quite lost their heads. There are all kinds of sets, you know. And —I don't think I see your application, in any event. The

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craze, as you call it, was all on a business basis. People ran after those who could tell them which shares were going up, and they gambled in those shares. That was all, was n't it ? "

Still looking intently at her, he dismissed her query with a little shake of the head. " ' On a business basis,' " he repeated, as if talking to himself. " They like to have things ' on a business basis.' "

He halted, with a hand held out over her arm, and she paused as well, in a reluctant, tentative way. " I don't understand you," she remarked, blankly.

" Let me put it in this way," he began, knitting his brows, and marshalling the thoughts and phrases with which his mind had been busy. " This is the question. You were saying that you were n't asked to join my Board. You explained in that way how I could do things for Plowden, and could n't do them for you. Oh, I know it was a joke—but it had its meaning—at least to me. Now I want to ask you—if I decide to form another Company, a very small and particular Company—if I should decide to form it, I say—could I come to you and ask you to join *that* Board ? Of course I could ask—but what I mean is—well, I guess you know what I mean."

The metaphor had seemed to him a most ingenious and satisfactory vehicle for his purpose, and it had broken down under him amid evidences of confusion which he could not account for. All at once his sense of physical ascendancy had melted away—disappeared. He looked at Lady Cressage for an instant, and knew there was something shuffling and nerveless in the way his glance then shifted to the dim mountain chain beyond. His heart fluttered surprisingly inside his breast, during the silence which ensued.

" Surely you must have said everything now that you

wished to say," she observed at last. She had been studying intently the trodden snow at her feet, and did not even now look up. The constraint of her manner, and a certain pleading hesitation in her words, began at once to restore his self-command.

"Do not talk of it any further, I beg of you," she went on. "We—we have been lagging behind unconscionably. If you wish to please me, let us hurry forward now. And please!—no more talk at all!"

"But just a word—you 're not angry?"

She shook her head very slightly.

"And you do know that I 'm your friend—your solid, twenty-four-carat friend?"

After a moment's pause, she made answer, almost in a whisper—"Yes—be my friend—if it amuses you,"—and led the way with precipitate steps down the winding road.

CHAPTER XIII

TWO days later, Thorpe and his young people took an early morning train for Geneva—homeward bound.

It was entirely easy to accept their uncle's declaration that urgent business summoned him to London, yet Julia and Alfred, when they chanced to exchange glances after the announcement, read in each other's eyes the formless impression that there were other things beside business. Their uncle, they realized, must be concerned in large and probably venturesome enterprises; but it did not fit with their conception of his character that commercial anxieties should possess the power to upset him. And upset he undeniably was.

They traced his disturbance, in a general way, to the morning following the excursion up to Glion and Caux. He told them then that he had slept very badly, and that they must "count him out" of their plans for the day. He continued to be counted out of what remained of their stay at Territet. He professed not to be ill, but he was restless and preoccupied. He ate little, but smoked continuously, and drank spirits a good deal, which they had not seen him do before. Nothing would induce him to go out either day.

Strangely enough, this disturbance of their uncle's equanimity synchronized with an apparent change in the attitude of their new friends on the floor below. This change was, indeed, more apparent than definable. The ladies were, to the nicest scrutiny, as kindly and affable

as ever, but the sense of comradeship had somehow vanished. Insensibly, the two parties had ceased to have impulses and tastes in common. There were no more trips together—no more fortuitous luncheons or formal dinners as a group.

The young people looked up at the front of the big hotel on this morning of departure, after they had clambered over the drifts into the snow-bedecked train, and opened the window of their compartment. They made sure that they could identify the windows of Miss Madden's suite, and that the curtains were drawn aside—but there was no other token of occupancy discernible. They had said good-bye to the two ladies the previous evening, of course—it lingered in their minds as a rather perfunctory ceremony—but this had not prevented their hoping for another farewell glimpse of their friends. No one came to wave a hand from the balcony, however, and the youngsters looked somewhat dubiously at each other as the train moved. Then intuitively they glanced toward their uncle—and perceived that he had his hat pulled over his eyes, and was staring with a kind of moody scowl at the lake opposite.

"Fortunately, it is a clear day," said Julia. "We shall see Mont Blanc."

Her voice seemed to have a hollow and unnatural sound in her own ears. Neither her uncle nor her brother answered her.

. . . . . .

At breakfast, meanwhile, in the apartment toward which the young people had turned their farewell gaze in vain, Miss Madden sipped her coffee thoughtfully while she read a letter spread upon the table beside her.

"It 's as they said," she observed. "You are not allowed to drive in the mountains with your own horses

and carriage. That seems rather quaint for a model Republic—does n't it?"

"I daresay they 're quite right," Lady Cressage replied, listlessly. "It 's in the interest of safety. People who do not know the mountains would simply go and get killed in avalanches and hurricanes—and all that. I suppose that is what the Government wishes to prevent."

"And you 're on the side of the Government," said the other, with a twinkle in her brown eyes. "Truly now—you hated the whole idea of driving over the Simplon."

Lady Cressage lifted her brows in whimsical assent as she nodded.

"But do you like this Russian plan any better?" demanded Celia. "I wish for once you would be absolutely candid and open with me—and let me know to the uttermost just what you think."

"'For once'?" queried the other. Her tone was placid enough, but she allowed the significance of the quotation to be marked.

"Oh, I never wholly know what you 're thinking," Miss Madden declared. She put on a smile to alleviate the force of her remarks. "It is not you alone—Edith. Don't think that! But it is ingrained in your countrywomen. You can't help it. It 's in your blood to keep things back. I 've met numbers of English ladies who, I 'm ready to believe, would be incapable of telling an untruth. But I 've never met one of whom I could be sure that she would tell me the whole truth. Don't you see this case in point," she pursued, with a little laugh, "I could not drag it out of you that you disliked the Simplon idea, so long as there was a chance of our going. Immediately we find that we can't go, you admit that you hated it."

"But you wanted to go," objected Lady Cressage,

quietly. "That was the important thing. What I wanted or did not want had nothing to do with the matter."

Celia's face clouded momentarily. "Those are not the kind of things I like to hear you say," she exclaimed, with a certain vigour. "They put everything in quite a false light. I am every whit as anxious that you should be pleased as that I should. You know that well enough. I 've said it a thousand times—and have I ever done anything to disprove it? But I never can find out what you do want—what really will please you! You never will propose anything; you never will be entirely frank about the things I propose. It 's only by watching you out of the corner of my eye that I can ever guess whether anything is altogether to your liking or not."

The discussion seemed to be following lines familiar to them both. "That is only another way of saying what you discovered long ago," said Lady Cressage, passively —"that I am deficient in the enthusiasms. But originally you were of the opinion that you had enthusiasms enough for two, and that my lack of them would redress the balance, so to speak. I thought it was a very logical opinion then, and, from my own point of view, I think so now. But if it does not work in practice, at least the responsibility of defending it is not mine."

"Delightful!" cried Celia, smiling gayly as she put down her cup again. "You are the only woman I 've ever known who was worth arguing with. The mere operation makes me feel as if I were going through Oxford—or passing the final Jesuit examinations. Heaven knows, I would get up arguments with you every day, for the pure enjoyment of the thing—if I were n't eternally afraid of saying something that would hurt your feelings, and then you would n't tell me, but would nurse the wound

in silence in the dark, and I should know that something was wrong, and have to watch you for weeks to make out what it was—and it would all be too unhappy. But it comes back, you see, to what I said before. You don't tell me things!"

Edith smiled in turn, affectionately enough, but with a wistful reserve. "It is a constitutional defect—even national, according to you. How shall I hope to change, at this late day? But what is it you want me to tell you? —I forget."

"The Russian thing. To go to Vienna, where we get our passports, and then to Cracow, and through to Kief, which they say is awfully well worth while—and next Moscow—and so on to St. Petersburg, in time to see the ice break up. It is only in winter that you see the characteristic Russia: that one has always heard. With the furs and the sledges, and the three horses galloping over the snow—it seems to me it must be the best thing in Europe—if you can call Russia Europe. That's the way it presents itself to me—but then I was brought up in a half-Arctic climate, and I love that sort of thing—in its proper season. It is different with you. In England you don't know what a real winter is. And so I have to make quite sure that you think you would like the Russian experiment."

The other laughed gently. "But if I don't know what a real winter is, how can I tell whether I will like it or not? All I do know is that I am perfectly willing to go and find out. Oh yes—truly—I should like very much to go."

Miss Madden sighed briefly. "All right," she said, but with a notable absence of conviction in her tone.

A space of silence ensued, as she opened and glanced through another note, the envelope of which had borne no postmark. She pouted her lips over the contents of this

missive, and raised her eyebrows in token of surprise, but as she laid it down she looked with a frank smile at her companion.

"It 's from our young friend," she explained, genially —"the painter-boy—Mr. D'Aubigny. It is to remind me of a promise he says I made—that when I came to London he should paint my portrait. I don't think I promised anything of the kind—but I suppose that is a detail. It 's all my unfortunate hair. They must have gone by this time—they were to go very early, were n't they?"

Lady Cressage glanced at the clock. "It was 8.40, I think—fully half an hour ago," she answered, with a painstaking effect of indifference.

"Curious conglomeration"—mused the other. "The boy and girl are so civilized, and their uncle is so rudimentary. I 'm afraid they are spoiling him—just as the missionaries spoil the noble savage. They ought to go away and leave him alone. As a barbarian he was rather effective—but they will whitewash him and gild him and make a tame monstrosity of him. But I suppose it 's inevitable. Having made his fortune, it is the rule that he must set up as a gentleman. We do it more simply in America. One generation makes the fortune, and leaves it to the next generation to put on the frills. My father, for example, never altered in the slightest degree the habits he formed when he was a poor workman. To the day of his death, blessed old man, he remained what he had always been—simple, pious, modest, hard-working, kindly, and thrifty—a model peasant. Nothing ever tempted him a hair's-breadth out of the path he had been bred to walk in. But such nobility of mind and temper with it all! He never dreamed of suggesting that I should walk in the same path. From my earliest child-

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hood I cannot remember his ever putting a limitation upon me that was n't entirely sensible and generous. I must have been an extremely trying daughter, but he never said so ; he never looked or acted as if he thought so.—But I never stop when I begin talking of my father."

"It 's always very sweet to me to hear you talk of him," Lady Cressage put in. "One knows so few people who feel that way about their fathers !"

Celia nodded gravely, as if in benevolent comment upon something that had been left unsaid. The sight of the young artist's note recalled her earlier subject. "Of course there is a certain difference," she went on, carelessly,—"this Mr. Thorpe is, not at all a peasant, as the phrase goes. He strikes one, sometimes, as having been educated."

"Oh, he was at a public school, Lord Plowden tells me," said the other, with interest. "And his people were booksellers—somewhere in London—so that he got a good smattering of literature and all that. He certainly has more right to set up as a gentleman than nine out of ten of the *nouveaux riches* one sees flaunting about nowadays. And he can talk very well indeed—in a direct, practical sort of way. I don't quite follow you about his niece and nephew spoiling him. Of course one can see that they have had a great effect upon him. He sees it himself—and he 's very proud of it. He told me so, quite frankly. But why should n't it be a nice effect ?"

"Oh, I don't know," Celia replied, idly. "It seemed to me that he was the kind of piratical buccaneer who ought n't to be shaved and polished and taught drawing-room tricks—I feel that merely in the interest of the fitness of things. Have you looked into his eyes—I mean when they 've got that lack-lustre expression ? You can see a hundred thousand dead men in them."

"I know the look you mean," said Lady Cressage, in a low voice.

"Not that I assume he is going to kill anybody," pursued Miss Madden, with ostensible indifference, but fixing a glance of aroused attention upon her companion's face, "or that he has any criminal intentions whatever. He behaves very civilly indeed, and apparently his niece and nephew idolize him. He seems to be the soul of kindness to them. It may be that I 'm altogether wrong about him—only I know I had the instinct of alarm when I caught that sort of dull glaze in his eye. I met an African explorer a year ago, or so, about whose expeditions dark stories were told, and he had precisely that kind of eye. Perhaps it was this that put it into my head—but I have a feeling that this Thorpe is an exceptional sort of man, who would have the capacity in him for terrible things, if the necessity arose for them."

"I see what you mean," the other repeated. She toyed with the bread-crumbs about her plate, and reflectively watched their manipulation into squares and triangles as she went on. "But may that not be merely the visible sign of an exceptionally strong and masterful character? And is n't it, after all, the result of circumstances whether such a character makes, as you put it, a hundred thousand dead men, or enriches a hundred thousand lives instead? We agree, let us say, that this Mr. Thorpe impresses us both as a powerful sort of personality. The question arises, How will he use his power? On that point, we look for evidence. You see a dull glaze in his eye, and you draw hostile conclusions from it. I reply that it may mean no more than that he is sleepy. But, on the other hand, I bring proofs that are actively in his favour. He is, as you say, idolized by the only two members of his family that we have seen—persons, more-

over, who have been brought up in ways different to his own, and who would not start, therefore, with prejudices in his favour. Beyond that, I know of two cases in which he has behaved, or rather undertaken to behave, with really lavish generosity—and in neither case was there any claim upon him of a substantial nature. He seems to me, in fact, quite too much disposed to share his fortune with Tom, Dick, and Harry—anybody who excites his sympathy or gets into his affections." Having said this much, Lady Cressage swept the crumbs aside and looked up. "So now," she added, with a flushed smile, "since you love arguments so much, how do you answer that?"

Celia smiled back. "Oh, I don't answer it at all," she said, and her voice carried a kind of quizzical implication. "Your proofs overwhelm me. I know nothing of him—and you know so much!"

Lady Cressage regarded her companion with a novel earnestness and directness of gaze. "I had a long, long talk with him—the afternoon we came down from Glion."

Miss Madden rose, and going to the mantel lighted a cigarette. She did not return to the table, but after a brief pause came and took an easy-chair beside her friend, who turned to face her. "My dear Edith," she said, with gravity, "I think you want to tell me about that talk—and so I beg you to do so. But if I 'm mistaken—why then I beg you to do nothing of the kind."

The other threw out her hands with a gesture of wearied impatience, and then clasped them upon her knee. "I seem not to know what I want! What is the good of talking about it? What is the good of anything?"

"Now—now!" Celia's assumption of a monitor's tone had reference, apparently, to something understood between the two, for Lady Cressage deferred to it, and even summoned the ghost of a smile.

"There is really nothing to tell," she faltered, hesitatingly—"that is, nothing happened. I don't know how to say it—the talk left my mind in a whirl. I could n't tell you why. It was no particular thing that was said—it seemed to be more the things that I thought of while something else was being talked about—but the whole experience made a most tremendous impression upon me. I 've tried to straighten it out in my own mind, but I can make nothing of it. That is what disturbs me, Celia. No man has ever confused me in this silly fashion before. Nothing could be more idiotic. I 'm supposed to hold my own in conversation with people of—well, with people of a certain intellectual rank,—but this man, who is of hardly any intellectual rank at all, and who rambled on without any special aim that one could see—he reduced my brain to a sort of porridge. I said the most extraordinary things to him—babbling rubbish which a schoolgirl would be ashamed of. How is that to be accounted for? I try to reason it out, but I can't. Can you?"

"Nerves," said Miss Madden, judicially.

"Oh, that is meaningless," the other declared. "Anybody can say 'nerves.' Of course, all human thought and action is 'nerves.'"

"But yours is a special case of nerves," Celia pursued, with gentle imperturbability. "I think I can make my meaning clear to you—though the parallel is n't precisely an elegant one. The finest thorough-bred dog in the world, if it is beaten viciously and cowed in its youth, will always have a latent taint of nervousness, apprehension, timidity—call it what you like. Well, it seems to me there 's something like that in your case, Edith. They hurt you too cruelly, poor girl. I won't say it broke your nerve—but it made a flaw in it. Just as a soldier's old wound aches when there 's a storm in the air—so your

old hurt distracts and upsets you under certain psychological conditions. It 's a rather clumsy explanation, but I think it does explain."

"Perhaps—I don't know," Edith replied, in a tone of melancholy reverie. "It makes a very poor creature out of me, whatever it is."

"I rather lose patience, Edith," her companion admonished her, gravely. "Nobody has a right to be so deficient in courage as you allow yourself to be."

"But I 'm not a coward," the other protested. "I could be as brave as anybody—as brave as you are—if a chance were given me. But of what use is bravery against a wall twenty feet high? I can't get over it. I only wound and cripple myself by trying to tear it down, or break through it.—Oh yes, I know what you say! You say there is no wall—that it is all an illusion of mine. But unfortunately I 'm unable to take that view. I 've battered myself against it too long—too sorely, Celia!"

Celia shrugged her shoulders in comment. "Oh, we women all have our walls—our limitations—if it comes to that," she said, with a kind of compassionate impatience in her tone. "We are all ridiculous together—from the point of view of human liberty. The free woman is a fraud—a myth. She is as empty an abstraction as the 'Liberty, Equality, Fraternity' that the French put on their public buildings. I used to have the most wonderful visions of what independence would mean. I thought that when I was absolutely my own master, with my money and my courage and my free mind, I would do things to astonish all mankind. But really the most I achieve is the occasional mild surprise of a German waiter. Even that palls on one after a time. And if you were independent, Edith—if you had any amount of money—what difference do you think it would make to

you? What could you do that you don't do, or could n't do, now?"

"Ah, now"—said the other, looking up with a thin smile—"now is an interval—an oasis."

Miss Madden's large, handsome, clear-hued face, habitually serene in its expression, lost something in composure as she regarded her companion. "I don't know why you should say that," she observed, gently enough, but with an effect of reproof in her tone. "I have never put limits to the connection, in my own mind—and it had n't occurred to me that you were doing so in yours."

"But I 'm not," interposed Lady Cressage.

"Then I understand you less than ever. Why do you talk about an 'interval'? What was the other word?—'oasis'—as if this were a brief halt for refreshments and a breathing-spell, and that presently you must wander forth into the desert again. That suggestion is none of mine. We agreed that we would live together—'pool our issues,' as they say in America. I wanted a companion; so did you. I have never for an instant regretted the arrangement. Some of my own shortcomings in the matter I have regretted. You were the most beautiful young woman I had ever seen, and you were talented, and you seemed to like me—and I promised myself that I would add cheerfulness and a gay spirit to your other gifts—and in that I have failed wofully. You 're not happy. I see that only too clearly."

"I know—I 'm a weariness and a bore to you," broke in the other, despondingly.

"That is precisely what you are not," Celia went on. "We must n't use words of that sort. They don't describe anything in our life at all. But I should be better pleased with myself if I could really put my finger on what it is that is worrying you. Even if we decided to

break up our establishment, I have told you that you should not go back to what you regard as poverty. Upon that score, I had hoped that your mind was easy. As I say, I think you attach more importance to money than those who have tested its powers would agree to—but that 's neither here nor there. You did not get on well on £600 a year—and that is enough. You shall never have less than twice that amount, whether we keep together or not—and if it ought to be three times the amount, that does n't matter.

" You don't seem to realize, Edith "—she spoke with increased animation—" that you are my caprice. You are the possession that I am proudest of and fondest of. There is nothing else that appeals to me a hundredth part as much as you do. Since I became independent, the one real satisfaction I have had is in being able to do things for you—to have you with me, and make you share in the best that the world can offer. And if with it all you remain unhappy, why then you see I don't know what to do."

" Oh, I know—I behave very badly! " Lady Cressage had risen, and with visible agitation began now to pace the room. " I deserve to be thrown into the lake—I know it well enough! But Celia—truly—I 'm as incapable of understanding it as you are. It must be that I am possessed by devils—like the people in the New Testament. Perhaps someone will come along who can cast them out. I don't seem able to do it myself. I can't rule myself at all. It needs a strength I have n't got ! "

" Ah ! " said Celia, thoughtfully. The excited sentences which Edith threw over her shoulder as she walked appeared, upon examination, to contain a suggestion.

" My dear child," she asked abruptly, after a moment's silence, " do you want to marry ? "

Lady Cressage paused at the mantel, and exchanged a long steadfast glance with her friend. Then she came slowly forward. "Ah, that is what I don't know," she answered. Apparently the reply was candid.

Miss Madden pursed her lips, and frowned a little in thought. Then, at some passing reflection, she smiled in a puzzled fashion. At last she also rose, and went to the mantel for another cigarette. "Now I am going to talk plainly," she said, with decision. "Since the subject is mentioned, less harm will be done by speaking out than by keeping still. There is a debate in your mind on the matter, is n't there?"

The other lady, tall, slender, gently ruminative once more, stood at the window and with bowed head looked down at the lake. "Yes—I suppose it might be called that," she replied, in a low voice.

"And you hesitate to tell me about it? You would rather not?" Celia, after an instant's pause, went on without waiting for an answer. "I beg that you won't assume my hostility to the idea, Edith. In fact, I 'm not sure I don't think it would be the best thing for you to do. Marriage, a home, children—these are great things to a woman. We can say that she pays the price of bondage for them—but to know what that signifies, we must ask what her freedom has been worth to her."

"Yes," interposed the other, from the window. "What have I done with my freedom that has been worth while?"

"Not much," murmured Celia, under her breath. She moved forward, and stood beside Edith, with an arm round her waist. They looked together at the lake.

"It is Lord Plowden, is it not?" asked the American, as the silence grew constrained.

Lady Cressage looked up alertly, and then hesitated over her reply. "No," she said at last. Upon reflection, and with a dim smile flickering in her side-long glance at Celia, she added, "He wants to marry you, you know."

"Leave that out of consideration," said Celia, composedly. "He has never said so. I think it was more his mother's idea than his, if it existed at all. Of course I am not marrying him, or anybody else. But I saw at Hadlow that you and he were—what shall I say?—old friends."

"He must marry money," the other replied. In an unexpected burst of candour she went on: "He would have asked me to marry him if I had had money. There is no harm in telling you that. It was quite understood—oh, two years ago. And I think I wished I had the money—then."

"And you don't wish it now?"

A slight shake of Edith's small, shapely head served for answer. After a little, she spoke in a musing tone: "He is going to have money of his own, very soon, but I don't think it would attract me now. I like him personally, of course, but—there is no career, no ambition, no future."

"A Viscount has future enough behind him," observed Celia.

"It does n't attract me," the other repeated, vaguely. "He is handsome, and clever, and kind and all that—but he would never appeal to any of the great emotions—nor be capable of them himself. He is too smooth, too well-balanced, too much the gentleman. That expresses it badly—but do you see what I mean?"

Celia turned, and studied the beautiful profile beside her, in a steady, comprehending look.

"Yes, I think I see what you mean," she said, with significance in her tone.

Lady Cressage flushed, and released herself from her companion's arm. "But I don't know myself what I mean!" she exclaimed, despairingly, as she moved away. "I don't know!—I don't know!"

CHAPTER XIV

ON the last day of February, Mrs. Dabney was surprised if not exhilarated by a visit from her two children in the little book-shop.

"It 's the last day in the world that I should have thought you 'd 'a' come out on," she told them, in salutation—and for comment they all glanced along the dark narrow alley of shelves to the street window. A gloomy spectacle it was indeed, with a cold rain slanting through the discredited remnants of a fog, which the east wind had broken up, but could not drive away, and with only now and again a passer-by moving across the dim vista, masked beneath an umbrella, or bent forward with chin buried in turned-up collar. In the doorway outside the sulky boy stamped his feet and slapped his sides with his arms in pantomimic mutiny against the task of guarding the book-stalls' dripping covers, which nobody would be mad enough to pause over, much less to lift.

"I don't know but I 'd ought to let the boy bring in the books and go home," she said, as their vague gaze was attracted by his gestures. "But it is n't three yet—it seems ridiculous to close up. Still, if you 'd be more comfortable upstairs——"

"Why, mamma! The idea of making strangers of us," protested Julia. She strove to make her tone cheerful, but its effect of rebuke was unmistakable.

The mother, leaning against the tall desk, looked blankly at her daughter. The pallid flicker of the gas-

jet overhead made her long, listless face seem more devoid of colour than ever.

"But you are as good as strangers, are n't you?" she observed, coldly. "You 've been back in town ten days and more, and I 've scarcely laid eyes upon either of you. But don't you want to sit down? You can put those parcels on the floor anywhere. Or shall I do it for you?"

Alfred had been lounging in the shadowed corner against a heap of old magazines tied in bundles. He sprang up now and cleared the chair, but his sister declined it with a gesture. Her small figure had straightened itself into a kind of haughty rigidity.

"There has been so much to do, mamma," she explained, in a clear, cool voice. "We have had hundreds of things to buy and to arrange about. All the responsibility for the housekeeping rests upon me—and Alfred has his studio to do. But of course we should have looked in upon you sooner—and much oftener—if we had thought you wanted us. But really, when we came to you, the very day after our return, it was impossible for us to pretend that you were glad to see us."

"Oh, I was glad enough," Mrs. Dabney made answer, mechanically. "Why should n't I be glad? And why should you think I was n't glad? Did you expect me to shout and dance?"

"But you said you would n't come to see us in Ovington Square," Alfred reminded her.

"That 's different," she declared. "What would I be doing in Ovington Square? It 's all right for you to be there. I hope you 'll be happy there. But it would n't add anything to your happiness to have me there; it would be quite the other way about. I know that, if you *don't*. This is my place, here, and I intend to stick to it!"

Julia's bright eyes, scanning the apathetic, stubborn maternal countenance, hardened beyond their wont. "You talk as if there had been some class war declared," she said, with obvious annoyance. "You know that Uncle Stormont would like nothing better than to be as nice to you as he is to us."

"Uncle Stormont!" Mrs. Dabney's repetition of the words was surcharged with hostile sarcasm.

"But his name was Stormont as much as it was Joel," broke in Alfred, from his dark corner. "He has a perfect right to use the one he likes best."

"Oh, I don't dispute his right," she replied, once more in her passionless monotone. "Everybody can call themselves whatever they please. It 's no affair of mine. You and your sister spell your father's name in a way to suit yourselves: I never interfered, did I? You have your own ideas and your own tastes. They are quite beyond me—but they 're all right for you. I don't criticize them at all. What I say is that it is a great mercy your uncle came along, with his pockets full of money to enable you to make the most of them. If I were religious I should call that providential."

"And that 's what we *do* call it," put in Julia, with vivacity. "And why should you shut your doors against this Providence, mamma? Just think of it! We don't insist upon your coming to live at Ovington Square at all. Probably, as you say, you would be happier by yourself—at least for the present. But when Uncle St—when uncle says there 's more than enough money for us all, and is only too anxious for you to let him do things for you—why, he 's your own brother! It 's as if I should refuse to allow Alfred to do things for me."

"That you never did," interposed the young man, gayly. "I 'll say that for you, Jule."

"And never will," she assured him, with cheerful decision. "But no—mamma—can't you see what we mean? We have done what you wanted us to do. You sent us both to much better schools than you could afford, from the time we were of no age at all—and when uncle's money came you sent us to Cheltenham. We did you no discredit. We worked very well; we behaved ourselves properly. We came back to you at last with fair reason to suppose that you would be—I won't say proud, but at least well satisfied with us—and then it turned out that you did n't like us at all."

"I never said anything of the sort," the mother declared, with a touch of animation.

"Oh no—you never said it," Julia admitted, "but what else can we think you mean? Our uncle sends for us to go abroad with him, and you busy yourself getting me ready, and having new frocks made and all that—and I never hear a suggestion that you don't want me to go——"

"But I did want you to go," Mrs. Dabney affirmed.

"Well, then, when I come back—when we come back, and tell you what splendid and generous plans uncle has made for us, and how he has taken a beautiful furnished house and made it our home, and so on,—why, you won't even come and look at the house!"

"But I don't want to see it," the mother retorted, obstinately.

"Well, then, you need n't!" said Alfred, rising. "Nobody will ask you again."

"Oh yes they will," urged Julia, glancing meaningly from one to the other. All her life, as it seemed, she had been accustomed to mediate between these two unpliable and stubborn temperaments. From her earliest childhood she had understood, somehow, that there was a Dabney

habit of mind, which was by comparison soft and if not yielding, then politic: and set over against it there was a Thorpe temper full of gnarled and twisted hardnesses, and tenacious as death. In the days of her grandfather Thorpe, whom she remembered with an alarmed distinctness, there had existed a kind of tacit idea that his name alone accounted for and justified the most persistent and stormy bad temper. That old man with the scowling brows bullied everybody, suspected everybody, apparently disliked everybody, vehemently demanded his own will of everybody—and it was all to be explained, seemingly, by the fact that he was a Thorpe.

After his disappearance from the scene—unlamented, to the best of Julia's juvenile perceptions—there had been relatively peaceful times in the book-shop and the home overhead, yet there had existed always a recognized line of demarcation running through the household. Julia and her father—a small, hollow-chested, round-shouldered young man, with a pale, anxious face and ingratiating manner, who had entered the shop as an assistant, and remained as a son-in-law, and was now the thinnest of unsubstantial memories—Julia and this father had stood upon one side of this impalpable line as Dabneys, otherwise as meek and tractable persons, who would not expect to have their own way.

Alfred and his mother were Thorpes—that is to say, people who necessarily had their own way. Their domination was stained by none of the excesses which had rendered the grandfather intolerable. Their surface temper was in truth almost sluggishly pacific. Underneath, however, ugly currents and sharp rocks were well known to have a potential existence—and it was the mission of the Dabneys to see that no wind of provocation unduly stirred these depths. Worse even than these pos-

sibilities of violence, however, so far as every-day life was concerned, was the strain of obstinacy which belonged to the Thorpe temper. A sort of passive mulishness it was, impervious to argument, immovable under the most sympathetic pressure, which particularly tried the Dabney patience. It seemed to Julia now, as she interposed her soothing influence between these jarring forces, that she had spent whole years of her life in personal interventions of this sort.

"Oh yes they will," she repeated, and warned her brother into the background with a gesture half-pleading, half-peremptory. "We are your children, and we 're not bad or undutiful children at all, and I 'm sure that when you think it all over, mamma, you 'll see that it would be absurd to let anything come between you and us."

"How could I help letting it come?" demanded the mother, listlessly argumentative. "You had outgrown me and my ways altogether. It was nonsense to suppose that you would have been satisfied to come back and live here again, over the shop. I could n't think for the life of me what I was going to do with you. But now your uncle has taken all that into his own hands. He can give you the kind of home that goes with your education and your ideas—and what more do you want? Why should you come bothering me?"

"How unjust you are, mamma!" cried Julia, with a glaze of tears upon her bright glance.

The widow took her elbow from the desk, and, slowly straightening herself, looked down upon her daughter. Her long plain face, habitually grave in expression, conveyed no hint of exceptional emotion, but the fingers of the large, capable hands she clasped before her writhed restlessly against one another, and there was a husky threat of collapse in her voice as she spoke :

"If you ever have children of your own," she said, "and you slave your life out to bring them up so that they 'll think themselves your betters, and they act accordingly—then you 'll understand. But you don't understand now—and there 's no good our talking any more about it. Come in whenever it 's convenient—and you feel like it. I must go back to my books now."

She took up a pen at this, and opened the cash-book upon the blotter. Her children, surveying her blankly, found speech difficult. With some murmured words, after a little pause, they bestowed a perfunctory kiss upon her unresponsive cheek, and filed out into the rain.

Mrs. Dabney watched them put up their umbrella, and move off Strand-ward beneath it. She continued to look for a long time, in an aimless, ruminating way, at the dismal prospect revealed by the window and the glass of the door. The premature night was closing in miserably, with increasing rain, and a doleful whistle of rising wind round the corner. At last she shut up the unconsidered cash-book, lighted another gas-jet, and striding to the door, rapped sharply on the glass.

"Bring everything in!" she called to the boy, and helped out his apprehension by a comprehensive gesture.

Later, when he had completed his task, and one of the two narrow outlets from the shop in front was satisfactorily blocked with the wares from without, and all the floor about reeked with the grimy drippings of the oilskins, Mrs. Dabney summoned him to the desk in the rear.

"I think you may go home now," she said to him, with the laconic abruptness to which he was so well accustomed. "You have a home, have n't you?"

Remembering the exhaustive enquiries which the Mission people had made about him and his belongings, as a

preliminary to his getting this job, he could not but be surprised at the mistress's question. In confusion he nodded assent, and jerked his finger toward his cap.

"Got a mother?" she pursued.

Again he nodded, with augmented confidence.

"And do you think yourself better than she is?"

The urchin's dirty and unpleasant face screwed itself up in anxious perplexity over this strange query. Then it cleared as he thought he grasped the idea, and the rat-eyes he lifted to her gleamed with the fell acuteness of the Dials. "I sh'd be sorry if I was n't," he answered, in swift, rasping accents. "She 's a rare old boozer, she is! It 's a fair curse to an honest boy like me, to 'ave——"

"Go home!" she bade him, peremptorily—and frowned after him as he ducked and scuttled from the shop.

Left to herself, Mrs. Dabney did not reopen the cash-book—the wretched day, indeed, had been practically a blank in its history—but loitered about in the waning light among the shelves near the desk, altering the position of books here and there, and glancing cursorily through others. Once or twice she went to the door and looked out upon the rain-soaked street. A tradesman's assistant, opposite, was rolling the iron shutters down for the night. If business in hats was over for the day, how much more so in books! Her shop had never been fitted with shutters—for what reason she could not guess. The opened pages of numerous volumes were displayed close against the window, but no one had ever broken a pane to get at them. Apparently literature raised no desires in the criminal breast. To close the shop there was nothing to do but lock and bolt the door and turn out the lights. At last, as the conviction of nightfall forced itself upon her from the drenched darkness outside, she bent to put her hand to the key. Then, with a little start of surprise,

she stood erect. Someone was shutting an umbrella in the doorway, preparatory to entering the shop.

It was her brother, splashed and wet to the knees, but with a glowing face, who pushed his way in, and confronted her with a broad grin. There was such a masterful air about him, that when he jovially threw an arm round her gaunt waist, and gathered her up against his moist shoulder, she surprised herself by a half-laughing submission.

Her vocabulary was not rich in phrases for this kind of emergency. "Do mind what you 're about!" she told him, flushing not unpleasurably.

"Shut up the place!" he answered, with lordly geniality. "I 've walked all the way from the City in the rain. I wanted the exertion—I could n't have sat in a cab. Come back and build up the fire, and let 's have a talk. God! What things I 've got to tell you!"

"There is n't any fire down here," she said, apologetically, as they edged their way through the restricted alley to the rear. "The old fireplace took up too much room. Sometimes, in very sharp weather, I have an oil-stove in. Usually the gas warms it enough. You don't find it too cold—do you?—with your coat on? Or would you rather come upstairs?"

"Never mind the cold," he replied, throwing a leg over the stool before the desk. "I can't stay more 'n a minute or two. What do you think we 've done today?"

Louisa had never in her life seen her brother look so well as he did now, sprawling triumphantly upon the stool under the yellow gas-light. His strong, heavily-featured face had somehow ceased to be commonplace. It had acquired an individual distinction of its own. He looked up at her with a clear, bold eye, in which, despite its gloss of good-humour, she discerned a new authority.

The nervous and apprehensive lines had somehow vanished from the countenance, and with them, oddly enough, that lethargic, heavy expression which had been their complement. He was all vigour, readiness, confidence, now. She deemed him almost handsome, this curious, changeable brother of hers, as he beat with his fist in a measured way upon the desk-top to emphasize his words, and fastened his commanding gaze upon her.

"We took very nearly twenty thousand pounds today," he went on. "This is the twenty-eighth of February. A fortnight ago today was the first settlement. I was n't here, but Semple was—and the working of it is all in his hands. He kept as still as a mouse that first day. They had to deliver to us 26,000 shares, and they had n't got one, but we did n't make any fuss. The point was, you see, not to let them dream that they were caught in a trap. We did n't even put the price up to par. They had to come to Semple, and say there did n't seem to be any shares obtainable just at the moment, and what would he carry them over at? That means, to let them postpone delivery for another fortnight. He was as smooth as sweet-oil with them, and agreed to carry them over till today without any charge at all. But today it was a little different. The price was up ten shillings above par. That is to say, Semple arranged with a jobber, on the quiet, d' ye see? to offer thirty shillings for our one-pound shares. That offer fixed the making-up price. So then, when they were still without shares today, and had to be carried over again, they had to pay ten shillings' difference on each of twenty-six thousand shares, plus the difference between par and the prices they 'd sold at. That makes within a few hundreds of £20,000 in cash, for one day's haul. D' ye see?"

She nodded at him, expressively. Through previous

talks she had really obtained an insight into the operation, and it interested her more than she would have cared to confess.

"Well, then, we put that £20,000 in our pockets," he proceeded with a steady glow in his eyes. "A fortnight hence, that is March 14th, we ring the bell on them again, and they march up to the captain's office and settle a second time. Now what happens on the 14th? A jobber makes the price for Semple again, and that settles the new sum they have to pay us in differences. It is for us to say what that price shall be. We 'll decide on that when the time comes. We most probably will just put it up another ten shillings, and so take in just a simple £13,000. It 's best in the long run, I suppose, to go slow, with small rises like that, in order not to frighten anybody. So Semple says, at any rate."

"But why not frighten them?" Louisa asked. "I thought you wanted to frighten them. You were full of that idea a while ago."

He smiled genially. "I 've learned some new wrinkles since then. We 'll frighten 'em stiff enough, before we 're through with them. But at the start we just go easy. If they got word that there was a 'corner,' there would be a dead scare among the jobbers. They 'd be afraid to sell or name a price for Rubber Consols unless they had the shares in hand. And there are other ways in which that would be a nuisance. Presently, of course, we shall liberate some few shares, so that there may be some actual dealings. Probably a certain number of the 5,000 which went to the general public will come into the market too. But of course you see that all such shares will simply go through one operation before they come back to us. Some one of the fourteen men we are squeezing will snap them up and bring them straight to Semple, to get free

from the fortnightly tax we are levying on them. In that way we shall eventually let out say half of these fourteen 'shorts,' or perhaps more than half."

"What do you want to do that for?" The sister's grey eyes had caught a metallic gleam, as if from the talk about gold. "Why let anybody out? Why can't you go on taking their money for ever?"

Thorpe nodded complacently. "Yes—that 's what I asked too. It seemed to me the most natural thing, when you 'd got 'em in the vise, to keep them there. But when you come to reflect—you can't get more out of a man than there is in him. If you press him too hard, he can always go bankrupt—and then he 's out of your reach altogether, and you lose everything that you counted on making out of him. So, after a certain point, each one of the fourteen men whom we 're squeezing must be dealt with on a different footing. We shall have to watch them all, and study their resources, as tipsters watch horses in the paddock.

"You see, some of them can stand a loss of a hundred thousand pounds better than others could lose ten thousand. All that we have to know. We can take it as a principle that none of them will go bankrupt and lose his place on the Exchange unless he is pressed tight to the wall. Well, our business is to learn how far each fellow is from the wall to start with. Then we keep track of him, one turn of the screw after another, till we see he 's got just enough left to buy himself out. Then we 'll let him out. See?"

"It 's cruel, is n't it?" she commented, calmly meditative, after a little pause.

"Everything in the City is cruel," he assured her with a light tone. "All speculative business is cruel. Take our case, for example. I estimate in a rough way that

these fourteen men will have to pay over to us, in differences and in final sales, say seven hundred thousand pounds—maybe eight hundred. Well, now, not one of those fellows ever earned a single sovereign of that money. They 've taken the whole of it from others, and these others took it from others still, and so on almost indefinitely. There is n't a sovereign of it that has n't been through twenty hands, or fifty for that matter, since the last man who had done some honest work for it parted company with it. Well—money like that belongs to those who are in possession of it, only so long as they are strong enough to hold on to it. When someone stronger still comes along, he takes it away from them. They don't complain : they don't cry and say it 's cruel. They know it 's the rule of the game. They accept it—and begin at once looking out for a new set of fools and weaklings to recoup themselves on. That 's the way the City goes."

Thorpe had concluded his philosophical remarks with ruminative slowness. As he lapsed into silence now, he fell to studying his own hands on the desk-top before him. He stretched out the fingers, curved them in different degrees, then closed them tight and turned the bulky hard-looking fists round for inspection in varying aspects.

" That 's the kind of hand," he began again, thoughtfully, " that breaks the Jew in the long run, if there 's only grit enough behind it. I used to watch those Jews' hands, a year ago, when I was dining and wining them. They 're all thin and wiry and full of veins. Their fingers are never still ; they twist round and keep stirring like a lobster's feelers. But there aint any real strength in 'em. They get hold of most of the things that are going, because they 're eternally on the move. It 's their hellish industry and activity that gives them such a pull,

and makes most people afraid of them. But when a hand like that takes them by the throat "—he held up his right hand as he spoke, with the thick uncouth fingers and massive thumb arched menacingly in a powerful muscular tension—" when *that* tightens round their neck, and they feel that the grip means business—my God ! what good are they ?"

He laughed contemptuously, and slapped the relaxed palm on the desk with a noise which made his sister start. Apparently the diversion recalled something to her mind.

" There was a man in here asking about you today," she remarked, in a casual fashion. " Said he was an old friend of yours."

" Oh, yes, everybody 's my ' old friend ' now," he observed with beaming indifference. " I 'm already getting heaps of invitations to dinners and dances and all that. One fellow insisted on booking me for Easter for some salmon fishing he 's got way down in Cumberland. I told him I could n't come, but he put my name down all the same. Says his wife will write to remind me. Damn his wife ! Semple tells me that when our squeeze really begins and they realize the desperate kind of trap they 're in, they 'll simply shower attentions of that sort on me. He says the social pressure they can command, for a game of this kind, is something tremendous. But I 'm not to be taken in by it for a single pennyworth, d' ye see ? I dine with nobody ! I fish and shoot and go yachting with nobody ! Julia and Alfred and our own home in Ovington Square—that 'll be good enough for me. By the way—you have n't been out to see us yet. We 're all settled now. You must come at once—why not with me, now ?"

Louisa paid no heed to this suggestion. She had been rummaging among some loose papers on the top of the

desk, and she stepped round now to lift the lid and search about for something inside.

"He left a card for you," she said, as she groped among the desk's contents. "I don't know what I did with it. He wrote something on it."

"Oh, damn him, and his card too," Thorpe protested easily. "I don't want to see either of them."

"He said he knew you in Mexico. He said you 'd had dealings together. He seemed to act as if you 'd want to see him—but I did n't know. I did n't tell him your address."

Thorpe had listened to these apathetic sentences without much interest, but the sum of their message appeared suddenly to catch his attention. He sat upright, and after a moment's frowning brown study, looked sharply up at his sister.

"What was his name?" he asked with abruptness.

"I don't in the least remember," she made answer, holding the desk-top up, but temporarily suspending her search. "He was a little man, five-and-fifty, I should think. He had long grey hair—a kind of Quaker-looking man. He said he saw the name over the door, and he remembered your telling him your people were booksellers. He only got back here in England yesterday or the day before. He said he did n't know what you 'd been doing since you left Mexico. He did n't even know whether you were in England or not!"

Thorpe had been looking with abstracted intentness at a set of green-bound cheap British poets just at one side of his sister's head. "You must find that card!" he told her now, with a vague severity in his voice. "I know the name well enough, but I want to see what he 's written. Was it his address, do you remember? The name itself was Tavender, was n't it? Good God! Why is it

a woman never knows where she 's put anything? Even Julia spends hours looking for button-hooks or corkscrews or something of that sort, every day of her life! They 've got nothing in the world to do except know where things are, right under their nose, and yet that 's just what they don't know at all!"

"Oh, I have a good few other things to do," she reminded him, as she fumbled again inside the obscurity of the desk. "I can put my hand on any one of four thousand books in stock," she mildly boasted over her shoulder, "and that 's something you never learned to do. And I can tell if a single book is missing—and I would n't trust any shopman I ever knew to do that."

"Oh of course, you 're an exception," he admitted, under a sense of justice. "But I wish you 'd find the card."

"I know where it is," she suddenly announced, and forthwith closed the desk. Moving off into the remoter recesses of the crowded interior, she returned to the light with the bit of pasteboard in her hand. "I 'd stuck it in the little mirror over the washstand," she explained.

He almost snatched it from her, and stood up the better to examine it under the gas-light. "Where is Montague Street?" he asked, with rough directness.

"In Bloomsbury—alongside the Museum. That 's one Montague Street—I don't know how many others there may be."

Thorpe had already taken up his umbrella and was buttoning his coat. "Yes—Bloomsbury," he said hurriedly. "That would be his form. And you say he knew nothing about my movements or whereabouts—nothing about the Company, eh?" He looked at his watch as he spoke. Evidently the presence of this stranger had excited him a good deal.

"No," she assured him, reflectively; "no, I 'm sure he did n't. From what he said, he does n't know his way about London very well, or anywhere else, for that matter, I should say."

Thorpe nodded, and put his finger to his forehead with a meaning look. "No—he 's a shade off in the upper story," he told her in a confidential tone. "Still, it 's important that I should see him,"—and with only a hasty hand-shake he bustled out of the shop.

By the light of the street lamp opposite, she could see him on the pavement, in the pelting rain, vehemently signalling with his umbrella for a cab.

CHAPTER XV

"WE 've got a spare room here, have n't we?" Thorpe asked his niece, when she came out to greet him in the hall of their new home in Ovington Square. He spoke with palpable eagerness before even unbuttoning his damp great-coat, or putting off his hat. "I mean it 's all in working order ready for use?"

"Why yes, uncle," Julia answered, after a moment's thought. "Is someone coming?"

"I think so," he replied, with a grunt of relief. He seemed increasingly pleased with the project he had in mind, as she helped him off with his things. The smile he gave her, when she playfully took his arm to lead him into the adjoining library, was clearly but a part of the satisfied grin with which he was considering some development in his own affairs.

He got into his slippers and into the easy-chair before the bright fire and lit a cigar with a contented air.

"Well, my little girl?" he said, with genial inconsequence, and smiled again at her, where she stood beside the mantel.

"It will be such a lark to play the hostess to a stranger!" she exclaimed. "When is he coming?—I suppose it is a 'he,'" she added, less buoyantly.

"Oh—that fellow," Thorpe said, as if he had been thinking of something else. "Well—I can't tell just when he will turn up. I only learned he was in town—or in England—a couple of hours ago. I have n't seen

him yet at all. I drove round to his lodgings, near the British Museum, but he was n't there. He only comes there to sleep, but they told me he turned in early—by nine o'clock or so. Then I went round to a hotel and wrote a note for him, and took it back to his lodgings, and left it for him. I told him to pack up his things as soon as he got it, and drive here, and make this his home —for the time being at least."

"Then it 's some old friend of yours?" said the girl. "I know I shall like him."

Thorpe laughed somewhat uneasily. "Well—yes—he 's a kind of a friend of mine," he said, with a note of hesitation in his voice. "I don't know, though, that you 'll think much of him. He aint what you 'd call a ladies' man."

He laughed again at some thought the words conjured up. "He 's a curious, simple old party, who 'd just like a comfortable corner somewhere by himself, and would n't expect to be talked to or entertained at all. If he does come, he 'll keep to himself pretty well. He would n't be any company for you. I mean,—for you or Alfred either. I think he 's a Canadian or West Indian,—British subject, at all events,—but he 's lived all his life in the West, and he would n't know what to do in a drawing-room, or that sort of thing. You 'd better just not pay any attention to him. Pass the time of day, of course, but that 's all."

Julia's alert, small-featured face expressed some vague disappointment at what she heard, but her words were cheerful enough. "Oh of course—whatever he likes best," she said. "I will tell Potter to make everything ready. I suppose there 's no chance of his being here in time for dinner?"

Thorpe shook his head, and then lifted his brows over some new perplexity. "I guess he 'd want to eat his

meals out, anyway," he said, after some thought. "I don't seem to remember much about him in that respect —of course, everything was so different in camp out in Mexico—but I daresay he would n't be much of an ornament at the table. However, that 'll be all right. He 's as easy to manage as a rabbit. If I told him to eat on the roof, he 'd do it without a murmur. You see it 's this way, Julia: he 's a scientific man—a kind of geologist, and mining expert and rubber expert—and chemical expert and all sort of things. I suppose he must have gone through college—very likely he 'll turn out to have better manners than I was giving him credit for. I 've only seen him in the rough, so to speak. We were n't at all intimate then,—but we had dealings together, and there are certain important reasons why I should keep close in touch with him while he 's here in London. But I 'll try and do that without letting you be bothered."

"What an idea!" cried Julia. "As if that was n't what we had the house for—to see the people you want to see."

Her uncle smiled rather ruefully, and looked in a rather dubious way at his cigar. "Between you and me and the lamp-post, Jule," he said, with a slow, whimsical drawl, "there is n't a fellow in the world that I wanted to see less than I did him. But since he 's here—why, we 've got to make the best of it."

After dinner, Thorpe suffered the youngsters to go up to the drawing-room in the tacit understanding that he should probably not see them again that night. He betook himself then once more to the library, as it was called—the little, cozy, dark-panelled room off the hall, where the owner of the house had left two locked bookcases, and where Thorpe himself had installed a writing-desk and a diminutive safe for his papers. The chief

purpose of the small apartment, however, was indicated by the two big, round, low-seated easy-chairs before the hearth, and by the cigar boxes and spirit-stand and tumblers visible behind the glass of the cabinet against the wall. Thorpe himself called the room his "snuggery," and spent many hours there in slippered comfort, smoking and gazing contentedly into the fire. Sometimes Julia read to him, as he sat thus at his ease, but then he almost invariably went to sleep.

Now, when he had poured out some whiskey and water and lit a cigar, the lounging chairs somehow did not attract him. He moved about aimlessly in the circumscribed space, his hands in his pockets, his burly shoulders rounded, his face dulled and heavy as with a depression of doubt. The sound of the piano upstairs came intermittently to his ears. Often he ascended to the drawing-room to hear Julia play—and more often still, with all the doors open, he enjoyed the mellowed murmur of her music here at his ease in the big chair. But tonight he had no joy in the noise. More than once, as he slouched restlessly round the room, the notion of asking her to stop suggested itself, but he forbore to put it into action. Once he busied himself for a time in kneeling before his safe, and scrutinizing in detail the papers in one of the bundles it contained.

At last—it was after ten o'clock, and the music above had ceased—the welcome sounds of cab-wheels without, and then of the door-bell, came to dispel his fidgeting suspense. On the instant he straightened himself, and his face rearranged its expression. He fastened upon the door of the room the controlled, calm glance of one who is easily confident about what is to happen.

"Quaker-looking" was not an inapt phrase for the person whom the maid ushered into the room through this

door. He was a small, thin, elderly man, bowed of figure and shuffling in gait. His coat and large, low-crowned hat, though worn almost to shabbiness, conveyed an indefinable sense of some theological standard, or pretence to such a standard. His meagre face, too, with its infinity of anxious yet meaningless lines, and its dim spectacled eyes, so plainly overtaxed by the effort to discern anything clearly, might have belonged to any old village priest grown childish and blear-eyed in the solitude of stupid books. Even the blotches of tell-tale colour on his long nose were not altogether unclerical in their suggestion. A poor old man he seemed, as he stood blinking in the electric light of the strange, warm apartment—a helpless, worn old creature, inured through long years to bleak adverse winds, hoping now for nothing better in this world than present shelter.

"How do you do, Mr. Thorpe," he said, after a moment, with nervous formality. "This is unexpectedly kind of you, sir."

"Why—not at all!" said Thorpe, shaking him cordially by the hand. "What have we got houses for, but to put up our old friends? And how are you, anyway? You 've brought your belongings, have you? That 's right!" He glanced into the hall, to make sure that they were being taken upstairs, and then closed the door. "I suppose you 've dined. Take off your hat and coat! Make yourself at home. That 's it—take the big chair, there—so! And now let 's have a look at you. Well, Tavender, my man, you have n't grown any younger But I suppose none of us do. And what 'll you have to drink? I take plain water in mine, but there 's soda if you prefer it. And which shall it be—Irish or Scotch?"

Mr. Tavender's countenance revealed the extremity of his surprise and confusion at the warmth of this welcome.

It apparently awed him as well, for though he shrank into a corner of the huge chair, he painstakingly abstained from resting his head against its back. Uncovered, this head gained a certain dignity of effect from the fashion in which the thin, iron-grey hair, parted in the middle, fell away from the full, intellectual temples, and curled in meek locks upon his collar. A vague resemblance to the type of Wesley—or was it Froebel?—might have hinted itself to the observer's mind.

Thorpe's thoughts, however, were not upon types. "Well"—he said, from the opposite chair, in his roundest, heartiest voice, when the other had with diffidence suffered himself to be served, and had deferentially lighted on one side the big cigar pressed upon him—"Well—and how 's the world been using you?"

"Not very handsomely, Mr. Thorpe," the other responded, in a hushed, constrained tone.

"Oh, chuck the Misters!" Thorpe bade him. "Are n't we old pals, man? You 're plain Tavender, and I 'm plain Thorpe."

"You 're very kind," murmured Tavender, still abashed. For some minutes he continued to reply dolefully, and with a kind of shamefaced reluctance, to the questions piled upon him. He was in evil luck: nothing had gone well with him; it had been with the greatest difficulty that he had scraped together enough to get back to London on the chance of obtaining some expert commission; practically he possessed nothing in the world beyond the clothes on his back, and the contents of two old carpet-bags—these admissions, by degrees, were wormed from him.

"But have you parted with the concession, then, that you bought from me?" Thorpe suddenly asked him. "Help yourself to some more whiskey!"

Tavender sighed as he tipped the decanter. "It is n't any good," he answered, sadly. "The Government repudiates it—that is, the Central Government at Mexico. Of course, I never blamed you. I bought it with my eyes open, and you sold it in perfect good faith. I never doubted that at all. But it 's not worth the paper it 's written on—that 's certain. It 's that that busted me—that, and some other things."

"Well—well!" said Thorpe, blankly. His astonishment was obviously genuine, and for a little it kept him silent, while he pondered the novel aspects of the situation thus disclosed. Then his eyes brightened, as a new path outlined itself.

"I suppose you 've got the papers?—the concession and my transfer to you and all that?" he asked, casually.

"Oh, yes," replied Tavender. He added, with a gleam of returning self-command—"That 's all I have got."

"Let 's see—what was it you paid me?—Three thousand eight hundred pounds, was n't it?"

Tavender made a calculation in mental arithmetic. "Yes, something like that. Just under nineteen thousand dollars," he said.

"Well," remarked Thorpe, with slow emphasis, "I won't allow you to suffer that way by me. I 'll buy it back from you at the same price you paid for it."

Tavender, beginning to tremble, jerked himself upright in his chair, and stared through his spectacles at his astounding host. "You say"—he gasped—"you say you 'll buy it back!"

"Certainly," said Thorpe. "That 's what I said."

"I—I never heard of such a thing!" the other faltered with increasing agitation. "No—you can't mean it. It is n't common sense!"

"It 's common decency," replied the big man, in his

most commanding manner. "It 's life and death to you —and it does n't matter a flea-bite to me. So, since you came to grief through me, why should n't I do the fair thing, and put you back on your legs again?"

Tavender, staring now at those shrunken legs of his, breathed heavily. The thing overwhelmed him. Once or twice he lifted his head and essayed to speak, but no speech came to his thin lips. He moistened them eventually with a long deliberate pull at his glass.

"This much ought to be understood, however," Thorpe resumed, reflecting upon his words as he went along. "If I 'm to buy back a dead horse, like that, it 's only reasonable that there should be conditions. I suppose you 've seen by this time that even if this concession of ours was recognized by the Government there would n't be any money in it to speak of. I did n't realize that two years ago, any more than you did, but it 's plain enough now. The trade has proved it. A property of rubber trees has no real value—so long as there 's a wilderness of rubber trees all round that 's everybody's property. How can a man pay even the interest on his purchase money, supposing he 's bought a rubber plantation, when he has to compete with people who 've paid no purchase money at all, but just get out as much as they like from the free forest? You must know that that is so."

Tavender nodded eloquently. "Oh yes, I know that is so. You can prove it by me."

Thorpe grinned a little. "As it happens, that aint what I need to have you prove," he said, dryly. "Now *we* know that a rubber property is no good—but London does n't know it. Everybody here thinks that it 's a great business to own rubber trees. Why, man alive, do you know"—the audacity of the example it had occurred to him to cite brought a gratified twinkle to his eyes as

he went on—" do you know that a man here last year actually sold a rubber plantation for four hundred thousand pounds—two millions of dollars! Not in cash, of course, but in shares that he could do something with—and before he 's done with it, I 'm told, he 's going to make twice that amount of money out of it. That 'll show you what London is like."

" Yes—I suppose they do those things," remarked Tavender, vaguely.

" Well—my point is that perhaps I can do something or other with this concession of yours here. I may even be able to get my money back on it. At any rate I 'll take my chances on it—so that at least you shan't lose anything by it. Of course, if you 'd rather try and put it on the market yourself, why go ahead!"

There was a wistful pathos in the way Tavender shook his head. " Big money does n't mean anything to me any more," he said, wearily. " I 'm too old and I 'm too tired. Why—four—five—yes, half a dozen times I 've had enough money to last me comfortably all my life—and every time I 've used it as bait to catch bigger money with, and lost it all. I don't do that any more! I 've got something the matter with me internally that takes the nerve all out of me. The doctors don't agree about it, but whatever its name is I 've got it for keeps. Probably I shan't live very long "—Thorpe recalled that the old man had always taken a gloomy view of his health after the third glass—" and if you want to pay me the nineteen thousand dollars, or whatever it is, why I shall say ' God bless you,' and be more than contented."

" Oh, there 's something more to it than that," observed Thorpe, with an added element of business-like briskness in his tone. " If I let you out in this way—something, of course, you could never have dreamed would happen—

you must do some things for me. I should want you, for example, to go back to Mexico at once. Of course, I 'd pay your expenses out. Or say, I 'd give you a round four thousand pounds to cover that and some other things too. You would n't object to that, would you ? "

The man who, two hours before, had confronted existence with the change of his last five-pound note in his pocket, did not hesitate now. " Oh no, that would be all right," with reviving animation, he declared. He helped himself again from the cut-glass decanter. " What would you want me to do there ? "

" Oh, a report on the concession for a starter," Thorpe answered, with careful indifference. " I suppose they still know your name as an authority. I could make that all right anyway. But one thing I ought to speak of—it might be rather important—I would n't like to have you mention to anybody that the concession has at any time been yours. That might tend to weaken the value of your report, don't you see ? Let it be supposed that the concession has been my property from the start. You catch my point, don't you ? There never was any such thing as a transfer of it to you. It 's always been mine ! "

Tavender gave his benefactor a purblind sort of wink. " Always belonged to you ? Why of course it did," he said cheerfully.

The other breathed a cautious prolonged sigh of relief. " You 'd better light a fresh one, had n't you ? " he asked, observing with a kind of contemptuous tolerance the old man's efforts to ignite a cigar which had more than once unrolled like a carpenter's shaving in his unaccustomed fingers, and was now shapelessly defiant of both draught and suction. Tavender laughed to himself silently as he took a new cigar, and puffed at the match held by his companion. The air of innocence and long-

suffering meekness was falling rapidly away from him. He put his shabby boots out confidently to the fender and made gestures with his glass as he talked.

"My mistake," he declared, in insistent tones, "was in not turning down science thirty years ago and going in bodily for business. Then I should have made my pile as you seem to have done. But I tried to do something of both. Half the year I was assaying crushings, or running a level, or analyzing sugars, for a salary, and the other half I was trying to do a gamble with that salary on the strength of what I 'd learned. You can't ring the bell that way. You 've got to be either a pig or a pup. You can't do both. Now, for instance, if I 'd come to London when you did, and brought my money with me instead of buying your concession with it——"

"Why, what good do you suppose you would have done?" Thorpe interrupted him with good-natured brusqueness. "You 'd have had it taken from you in a fortnight! Why, man, do you know what London is? You 'd have had no more chance here than a naked nigger in a swamp-full of alligators."

"You seem to have hit it off," the other objected. "This is as fine a house as I was ever in."

"With me it 's different," Thorpe replied, carelessly. "I have the talent for money-making. I 'm a man in armour. The 'gators can't bite me, nor yet the rattlesnakes."

"Yes—men are made up differently," Tavender assented, with philosophical gravity. Then he lurched gently in the over-large chair, and fixed an intent gaze upon his host. "What did you make your money in?" he demanded, not with entire distinctness of enunciation. "It was n't rubber, was it?"

Thorpe shook his head. "There 's no money in rub-

ber. I 'm entirely in finance—on the Stock Exchange—dealing in differences," he replied, with a serious face.

The explanation seemed wholly acceptable to Tavender. He mused upon it placidly for a time, with his reverend head pillowed askew against the corner of the chair. Then he let his cigar drop, and closed his eyes.

The master of the house bent forward, and noiselessly helped himself to another glass of whiskey and water. Then, sinking back again, he eyed his odd guest meditatively as he sipped the drink. He said to himself that in all the miraculous run of luck which the year had brought him, this was the most extraordinary manifestation of the lot. It had been so easy to ignore the existence of this tiresome and fatuous old man, so long as he was in remote Mexico, that he had practically forgotten him. But he should not soon forget the frightened shock with which he had learned of his presence in London, that afternoon. For a minute or two, there in his sister's book-shop, it had seemed as if he were falling through the air—as if the substantial earth had crumbled away from under him. But then his nerve had returned to him, his resourceful brain had reasserted itself. With ready shrewdness he had gone out, and met the emergency, and made it the servant of his own purposes.

He could be glad now, unreservedly glad, that Tavender had come to London, that things had turned out as they had. In truth, he stood now for the first time on solid ground. When he thought of it, now, the risk he had been running all these months gave him a little sinking of the heart. Upon reflection, the performance of having sold the same property first to Tavender in Mexico and then to the Rubber Consols Company in London might be subject to injurious comment, or worse. The fact that it was not a real property to begin with had no place

in his thoughts. It was a concession—and concessions were immemorially worth what they would fetch. But the other thing might have been so awkward—and now it was all right!

For an hour and more, till the fire burnt itself out and the guest's snoring became too active a nuisance, Thorpe sat lost in this congratulatory reverie. Then he rose, and sharply shaking Tavender into a semblance of consciousness, led him upstairs and put him to bed.

Three days later he personally saw Tavender off at Waterloo station by the steamer-train, en route for Southampton and New York. The old man was in childlike good spirits, looking more ecclesiastical than ever in the new clothes he had been enabled to buy. He visibly purred with content whenever his dim eyes caught sight of the new valise and steamer trunk, which belonged to him, on the busy platform.

"You've been very kind to me, Thorpe," he said more than once, as they stood together beside the open door of the compartment. "I was never so hospitably treated before in my life. Your attention to me has been wonderful. I call you a true friend."

"Oh, that 's all right! Glad to do it," replied the other, lightly. In truth he had not let Tavender stray once out of his sight during those three days. He had dragged him tirelessly about London, showing him the sights from South Kensington Museum to the Tower, shopping with him, resting in old taverns with him, breakfasting, lunching, and dining with him—in the indefatigable resolution that he should strike up no dangerous gossiping acquaintance with strangers. The task had been tiresome in the extreme—but it had been very well worth while.

"One thing I 'm rather sorry about," Tavender re-

marked, in apologetic parenthesis—"I ought to have gone down and seen that brother-in-law of mine in Kent. He 's been very good to me, and I 'm not treating him very well. I wrote to tell him I was coming—but since then I have n't had a minute to myself. However, I can write to him and explain how it happened. And probably I 'll be over again sometime."

"Why, of course," said Thorpe, absently. The allusion to the brother-in-law in Kent had escaped his notice, so intent was he upon a new congeries of projects taking vague shape in his mind.

"Think of yourself as my man out there," he said now, slowly, following the clue of his thoughts. "There may be big things to do. Write to me as often as you can. Tell me everything that 's going on. Money will be no object to me—you can have as much as you like—if things turn up out there that are worth taking up. But mind you say nothing about me—or any connection you 've ever had with me. You 'll get a letter from the Secretary of a Company and the Chairman asking for a report on a certain property, and naming a fee. You simply make a good report—on its merits. You say nothing about anything else—about me, or the history of the concession, or its validity, or anything. I must n't be alluded to in any way. You quite understand that?"

"Trust me!" said the old man, and wrung his benefactor's hand.

It was indeed with a trustful eye that Thorpe watched the train draw out of the station.

CHAPTER XVI

THE week following the August Bank Holiday is very rarely indeed a busy or anxious time in the City. In the ordinary course of things, it serves as the easy-going prelude—with but casual and inattentive visits eastward, and with only the most careless glances through the financial papers—to the halcyon period of the real vacation. Men come to the City during this week, it is true, but their thoughts are elsewhere—on the moors, on the blue sea, on the glacier, or the fiord, or the pleasant German pine forests.

To the great mass of City people, this August in question began in a normal enough fashion. To one little group of operators, however, and to the widening circle of brokers, bankers, and other men of affairs whose interests were more or less involved with those of this group, it was a season of keen perturbation. A combat of an extraordinary character was going on—a combat which threatened to develop into a massacre. Even to the operators who, unhappily for themselves, were principals in this fight, it was a struggle in the dark. They knew little about it, beyond the grimly-patent fact that they were battling for their very lives. The outer ring of their friends and supporters and dependents knew still less, though their rage and fears were perhaps greater. The "press" seemed to know nothing at all. This unnatural silence of the City's mouthpieces, usually so resoundingly clamorous upon the one side and the other when a duel is

in progress, gave a sinister aspect to the thing. The papers had been gagged and blindfolded for the occasion. This in itself was of baleful significance. It was not a duel which they had been bribed to ignore. It was an assassination.

Outwardly there was nothing to see, save the unofficial, bald statement that on August 1st, the latest of twelve fortnightly settlements in this stock, Rubber Consols had been bid for, and carried over, at £15 for one-pound shares. The information concerned the public at large not at all. Nobody knew of any friend or neighbour who was fortunate enough to possess some of these shares. Readers here and there, noting the figures, must have said to themselves that certain lucky people were coining money, but very little happened to be printed as to the identity of these people. Stray notes were beginning to appear in the personal columns of the afternoon papers about a "Rubber King" of the name of Thorpe, but the modern exploitation of the world's four corners makes so many "kings" that the name had not, as yet, familiarized itself to the popular eye.

City men, who hear more than they read, knew in a general way about this "Rubber King." He was an outsider who had come in, and was obviously filling his pockets: but it was a comforting rule that outsiders who did this always got their pockets emptied for them again in the long run. There seemed nothing about Thorpe to suggest that he would prove an exception to the rule. He was investing his winnings with great freedom, so the City understood, and his office was besieged daily by promoters and touts. They could clean out his strong-box faster than the profits of his Rubber corner could fill it. To know such a man, however, could not but be useful, and they made furtive notes of his number in Austin Friars on their cuffs, after conversation had drifted from him to other topics.

As to the Rubber corner itself, the Stock Exchange as a whole was apathetic. When some of the sufferers ventured cautious hints about the possibility of official intervention on their behalf, they were laughed at by those who did not turn away in cold silence. Of the fourteen men who had originally been caught in the net drawn tight by Thorpe and Semple, all the conspicuous ones belonged to the class of "wreckers," a class which does not endear itself to Capel Court.

Both Rostocker and Aronson, who, it was said, were worst hit, were men of great wealth, but they had systematically amassed these fortunes by strangling in their cradles weak enterprises, and by undermining and toppling over other enterprises which would not have been weak if they had been given a legitimate chance to live. Their system was legal enough, in the eyes alike of the law and of the Stock Exchange rules. They had an undoubted right to mark out their prey and pursue it, and bring it down, and feed to the bone upon it. But the exercise of this right did not make them beloved by the begetters and sponsors of their victims. When word first went round, on the last day of February, that a lamb had unexpectedly turned upon these two practised and confident wolves, and had torn an ear from each of them, and driven them pell-mell into a "corner," it was received on all sides with a gratified smile.

Later, by fortnightly stages, the story grew at once more tragic and more satisfactory. Not only Rostocker and Aronson, but a dozen others were in the *cul de sac* guarded by this surprising and bloody-minded lamb. Most of the names were well-known as those of "wreckers." In this category belonged Blaustein, Ganz, Rothfoere, Lewis, Ascher, and Mendel, and if Harding, Carpenter, and Vesey could not be so confidently classified, at least

their misfortune excited no particular sympathy. Two other names mentioned, those of Norfell and Pinney, were practically unknown.

There was some surprise, however, at the statement that the old and respected and extremely conservative firm of Fromentin Bros. was entangled in the thing. Egyptian bonds, minor Levantine loans, discounts in the Arabian and Persian trades—these had been specialties of the Fromentins for many years. Who could have expected to find them caught among the "shorts" in Mexican rubber? It was Mexico, was n't it, that these Rubber Consols purported to be connected with?

Thorpe's Company, upon its commercial merits, had not been considered at all by the gentlemen of the Stock Exchange, at the time of its flotation. Men vaguely and with difficulty recalled the fact of its prospectus, when the "corner" in its shares was first talked about. They looked it up in their lists and files, later on, but its terms said nothing to them. Nobody discussed the value of the assets owned by this Company, or the probability of its paying a dividend—even when the price bid for its shares was making the most sensational upward leaps. How Thorpe stood with his shareholders, or whether he had any genuine shareholders behind him at all, was seen by the keen eyes of Capel Court to be beside the question. Very likely it was a queer affair, if the truth were known —but at least it had substance enough in it to be giving the "wreckers" a lively time.

By the end of July it was understood that the fight was better worth watching than anything that had been seen in a long time. The only trouble was that there was so little to see. The papers said nothing. The sufferers were the reverse of garrulous. The little red Scotchman, Semple, who was the visible avenging sword of the "cor-

ner," was more imperturbably silent than anybody else. His fellow-members in the "House" watched him now, however, with a new respect. They discovered unsuspected elements of power in his thin, tight mouth, in the direct, cold glances of his brown-grey eyes, in the very way he carried his head and wore his hat. He came to be pointed out, and nodded about behind his back, more than anyone else in the "House," and important men sought his acquaintance, with an awkward show of civility, who were notorious for their rude exclusiveness.

It might be, of course, that his "corner" would break under him at any fortnightly settlement, but already he had carried it much further than such things often went, and the planning of the *coup* had been beyond doubt Napoleonic.

Had this small sandy Scot planned it, or was he merely the weapon in Thorpe's hand? Both views had their supporters on the Exchange, but after the wrench of August 1st, when with an abrupt eighty-shilling rise the price of Rubber Consols stood at £15, and it was to be computed that Semple had received on that single day nearly £75,000 in differences and "backwardation," a story was set afloat which gave Thorpe the undivided credit of the invention. It was related as coming from his own lips that he had schemed it all out to be revenged upon a group of Jewish operators, against whom he had a grievance. In confirmation of this tale, it was pointed out that, of the seven men still held pinned in the fatal "corner," six were Jews—and this did, upon first glance, look significant. But then it was objected, upon reflection, that Blaustein and Ascher had both been permitted to make their escape, and this hardly justified the theory of an implacable anti-Semitic vendetta. The objection seemed reasonable, but it was met in turn by the point that

Blaustein and Ascher had been bled white, as Bismarck's phrase went, before they were released, whereas the five Christians had been liberated with relatively moderate fines. Upon the whole, a certain odour of the *Judenhetze* clung thereafter about the "corner" in Rubber Consols.

On an afternoon of the following week, Mr. Stormont Thorpe was alone in the Board Room of the offices in Austin Friars. He had risen from the great roller-topped desk over between the windows, and walked now with a lethargic, tired step to and fro before the empty fireplace, yawning more than once, and stretching out his arms in the supreme gesture of fatigue. After a dozen listless rounds, something occurred to him. He moved with a certain directness of purpose to the cabinet in the corner, unlocked it, and poured out for himself a tumbler of brandy and soda. He drank it without a pause, then turned again, and began pacing up and down as before, his hands clasped behind him, his head bent in thought.

The intervening six months had effected visible changes in the outer man. One noted most readily that the face had grown fuller in its lower parts, and was far less browned than formerly. The large, heavy countenance, with its square jaws masked now under increased flesh, its beginnings of a double-chin, and its slightly flabby effect of pallor, was no longer lacking in individual distinction. It was palpably the visage of a dictator. The moustache had been cut down to military brevity, and the line of mouth below it was eloquent of rough power. The steady grey eyes, seemingly smaller yet more conspicuous than before, revealed in their glance new elements of secretiveness, of strategy supported by abundant and confident personal force.

The man himself seemed scarcely to have grown stouter. He held himself more compactly, as it were; seemed more

the master of all his physical expressions. He was dressed like a magnate who was also a person of taste. There was a flower in the lapel of his well-shaped frock-coat, and the rustle of his starched and spotless white waistcoat murmured pleasantly of refined toilets.

"The Marquis of Chaldon—and a gentleman, with him."

The announcement, from a clerk who had noiselessly opened the door, imposed itself with decorum upon Thorpe's reverie.

"Who is the gentleman with him?" Thorpe began austerely to ask, after an instant's hesitation. But this briefest of delays had brought the callers into plain view behind the clerk, and with a slight gesture the master assented to their entrance.

This large apartment was no longer called the Board Room by anybody. By tacit processes, it had become Mr. Thorpe's room. Not even the titular Chairman of the Company, the renowned and eminent Lord Chaldon, ex-Ambassador and ex-Viceroy, entered this chamber now with any assumption of proprietorship in it. No hint of a recollection that there were such things as the Company and the Board, or that he was nominally the head of both, expressed itself in his Lordship's demeanour as he advanced, his hand a little extended.

The noble Chairman was white of beard and hair, and extremely courteous of manner—a small, carefully-clad, gracious old gentleman, whose mild pink countenance had, with years of anxiety about ways and means, disposed itself in lines which produced a chronic expression of solicitude. A nervous affection of the eyelids lent to this look, at intervals, a beseeching quality which embarrassed the beholder. All men had liked him, and spoken well of him throughout his long and hard-worked career.

Thorpe was very fond of him indeed, and put a respectful cordiality into his grasp of the proffered hand. Then he looked, with a certain thinly-veiled bluntness of enquiry, past the Marquis to his companion.

"You were very kind to give me the appointment," said Lord Chaldon, with a little purring gloss of affability upon the earnestness of his tone. "I wish very much to introduce to you my friend, my old friend I may say, Monsieur Alexandre Fromentin. We slept together under the same tent, in the Persian country beyond Bagdad—oh, it must have been quite forty years ago. We were youngsters looking to win our first spurs then—I in my line, he in his. And often since we have renewed that old friendship—at many different places—India, and Constantinople, and Egypt. I wish heartily to commend him to your—your kindness."

Thorpe had perfunctorily shaken hands with the stranger—a tall, slender, sharp-faced, clean-shaven, narrow-shouldered man, who by these accounts of his years ought not to have such excessively black hair. He bowed in a foreign fashion, and uttered some words which Thorpe, though he recognized them as English in intent, failed to follow. The voice was that of an elderly man, and at a second glance there were plenty of proofs that he might have been older than the Marquis, out there in Persia, forty years ago. But Thorpe did not like old men who dyed their hair, and he offered his visitors chairs, drawn up from the table toward his desk, with a certain reserve of manner. Seating himself in the revolving chair at the desk itself, he put the tips of his fingers together, and looked this gentleman with the Continental name and experience in the face.

"Is there something you wish me to do?" he asked, passively facilitating the opening of conversation.

"Ah, my God! 'Something'!"—repeated the other, with a fluttering gesture of his hands over his thin, pointed knees—"everything, Mr. Thorpe!"

"That 's a tolerably large order, is n't it?" Thorpe asked, calmly, moving a slow, inscrutable glance from one to the other of his callers.

"I could ask for nothing that would be a greater personal favour—and kindness"—Lord Chaldon interposed. His tone bore the stress of sincerity.

"That means a great deal to me, as you know, my Lord," replied Thorpe, "but I don't in the least understand—what is it that your friend wants?"

"Only that I shall not be buried in a bankrupt's grave," the suppliant answered, with a kind of embittered eagerness of utterance. "That I shall not see disgraced the honoured name that my father and his father bequeathed to my care!"

Thorpe's large, composed countenance betrayed a certain perplexity. "There must be a mistake," he observed. "I don't even know this name of yours. I never heard it before."

The other's mobile face twisted itself in a grimace of incredulity. He had a conspicuously wide mouth, and its trick of sidelong extension at this moment was very unpleasant. "Ah, *Herr Je!* He never heard it," he ejaculated, turning nervously to the Marquis. "Would to the good God you never had!" he told Thorpe, with suppressed excitement.

Lord Chaldon, his own voice shaken a little, interposed with an explanation. "My friend is the head—the respected head—of the firm of Fromentin Brothers. I think you have—have dealings with them."

Thorpe, after a furtive instant of bewilderment, opened his mouth. "Oh! I see," he said. "I know what you

mean now. With the French pronunciation, I did n't recognize the name. I 've always heard it called ' Fro-men'-tin ' here in London. Oh, yes, of course—Fro-men'tin Brothers."

His lips shut tight again at this. The listeners had caught no helpful clue from the tone of his words. They exchanged a glance, and then M. Fromentin spoke.

" Mr. Thorpe," he began, slowly, with an obvious effort at self-repression. " It is a very simple story. Our house is an old one. My father's grandfather organized the finance of the commissariat of General Bonaparte in Egypt. He created the small beginnings of the carpet and rug importation from Asia Minor. His son, and in turn his son, followed him. They became bankers as well as importers. They helped very greatly to develop the trade of the Levant. They were not avaricious men, or usurers. It is not in our blood. Your Chairman, Lord Chaldon, who honours me so highly by calling me his friend—he will assure you that we have a good name in the East. Our banks have befriended the people, and never oppressed or injured them. For that reason—I will say perhaps for that reason—we have never become a very rich house. It is possible to name bankers who have made large fortunes out of Egypt. It was different with us. Lord Chaldon will tell you that of our own free will —my two brothers and I—of our own choice we consented to lose a fifth of all our possessions, rather than coin into gold by force the tears and blood of the wretched fellaheen."

" Yes—I have never known a more honourable or humane action," put in the Marquis, fervently.

" And then my brothers die—Polydor, who lived mostly at Smyrna, and whose estate was withdrawn from the business by his widow, and Augustin, who lived here in

London after 1870, and died—it is now six years ago. He left a son, Robert, who is my nephew, and my partner. He is now of an age—perhaps thirty years. He was a small child when he came to London—he has become more English than the English themselves. His activity and industry are very great ; he forms plans of such magnitude and numbers that they would compel his grandfather to turn in his coffin. I am in indifferent health. I live much at Homburg and Marienbad and at Cairo. Practically speaking, I have retired from business. There remain branches of our house in several places—but the London house has become the centre of all things—and Robert has become the London house. This I make plain to your mind, do I, Mr. Thorpe ? "

The other, with his chin sunk within the collar of his white waistcoat, and scrutinizing the narrator with a steadfast though impassive glance, made the faintest possible nod of assent.

" I had great confidence in Robert," the old man went on. His eyes were dimming with tears, and his voice quavered uncertainly. " His plans seemed wise, even if they risked more than formerly. The conditions of business are wholly altered since my youth—and it was best, I thought, to make Robert free to act under these conditions, which he understood much better than I could pretend to do. Thus it was that when he said it was necessary for Fromentin Brothers to belong to the Stock Exchange, I did not object. He was active and bold and clever, and he was in the thick of the fight. Therefore he should be the judge in all things. And that is our ruin. In the time of the South African excitement, he won a great deal of money. Then he lost it all and more. Then gambling began, and his fortunes went, now up, now down, but always, as his books show to me now—

sinking a little on the average. He grew more adventurous—more careless. He put many small counters upon different numbers on the table. You know what I mean? And in an accursed moment, because other gamblers were doing the same, he sold two thousand of your shares, without having them in his hands. *Voilà!* He wishes now to put a bullet through his brain. He proposes that as the fitting end of Fromentin Frères."

Thorpe, his chin on his breast, continued to regard the melancholy figure opposite with a moody eye. It seemed a long minute before he broke the tense silence by a sigh of discomfort. "I do not discuss these things with anybody," he said then, coldly. "If I had known who you were, I don't think you 'd have got in."

The Marquis of Chaldon intuitively straightened himself in his chair, and turned toward the speaker a glance of distressed surprise.

"Or no—I beg your pardon," Thorpe hastened to add, upon the instant hint of this look—"that does n't convey my meaning. Of course, our Chairman brings whom he pleases. His friends—as a matter of course—are our friends. What I should have said was that if this had been mentioned beforehand to me, I should have explained that it was n't possible to discuss that particular business."

"But—pardon me"—said Lord Chaldon, in a quiet, very gentle, yet insistent voice, which seemed now to recall to its listeners the fact that sovereigns and chancellors had in their day had attentive ears for its tones—"pardon me, but why should it not be possible?"

Thorpe frowned doubtfully, and shifted his position in his chair. "What could I say, if it were discussed?" he made vague retort. "I 'm merely one of the Directors. You are our Chairman, but you see he has n't found it of

any use to discuss it with you. There are hard and fast rules about these things. They run their natural course. You are not a business man, my Lord——"

"Oh, I think I may be called a 'business man,'" interposed the nobleman, suavely. "They would tell you so in Calcutta, I think, and in Cairo too. When one considers it, I have transacted a great deal of business—on the behalf of other people. And if you will permit me—I do not impute indirection, of course—but your remark seems to require a footnote. It is true that I am Chairman of the Board on which you are a Director—but it is not quite the whole truth. I as Chairman know absolutely nothing about this matter. As I understand the situation, it is not in your capacity as a Director that you know anything about it either. Yet——"

He paused, as if suddenly conscious of some impropriety in this domestic frankness before a third party, and Thorpe pounced through his well-mannered hesitation with the swiftness of a bird of prey.

"Let me suggest," he said roundly, lifting his head and poising a hand to hold attention, while he thought upon what it was he should suggest—"this is what I would say. It seems rather irregular, does n't it? to debate the matter in the presence of an outsider. You see it yourself. That is partly what I meant. Now I have met Mr. Fromentin," he gave the name its English vowels with an obstinate emphasis, "and I have heard his statement. You have heard it too. If he wishes to lay more facts before us, why, well and good. But then I would suggest that he leave the matter in our hands, to discuss and look into between ourselves. That seems to you the proper course, does n't it, Lord Chaldon?"

The French banker had been studying with strained acuteness the big lymphatic mask of the Director, with

sundry sharp glances aside at the Chairman. The nervous changes on his alert, meagre old face showed how intently he followed every phase of their talk. A certain sardonic perception of evil in the air curled on his lip when he saw the Marquis accede with a bow and wave of the hand to Thorpe's proposition. Then he made his bow in turn, and put the best face possible upon the matter.

"Naturally I consult your convenience—and the proprieties," he said, with an effect of proud humility. "There are but a few other facts to submit. My nephew has already paid, in differences upon those accursed two thousand shares, a sum of nearly £30,000. I have the figures in my pocket—but they are fixed in my head as well. Twenty-eight thousand five hundred, those differences already amount to, not to speak of interest. At the last settlement, August 1st, the price per share was £15. That would make £30,000 more, if we bought now—or a total of practically £60,000. *Eh bien!* I beg for the privilege of being allowed to buy these shares now. It is an unpleasant confession to make, but the firm of Fromentin Frères will be made very poor by this loss of £60,000. It was not always so, but it is so now. My nephew Robert has brought it into that condition. You see my shame at this admission. With all my own means, and with his sister's marriage portion, we can make up this sum of £30,000, and still enable the firm to remain in existence. I have gone over the books very painstakingly, since I arrived in London. It can be kept afloat, and it can be brought back to safe and moderately profitable courses—if nothing worse happens. With another six weeks like the last, this will not be at all possible. We shall have the cup of dishonour thrust between our teeth. That will be the end of everything."

M. Fromentin finished in tremulous, grave tones. After

looking with blurred eyes for a moment into Thorpe's face, he bowed his head, and softly swayed the knees upon which his thin, dark hands maintained their clutch. Not even the revelation of hair quite white at the roots, unduly widening the track of parting on the top of his dyed head, could rob this movement of its mournful dignity.

Thorpe, after a moment's pause, took a pencil and paper from the desk, and made a calculation. He bit his lips and frowned at the sight of these figures, and set down some others, which seemed to please him no more. Then, with a sudden gesture as of impatience, he rose to his feet.

"How much is that sister's marriage portion you spoke of?" he asked, rather brusquely.

The French gentleman had also risen. He looked with an air of astonishment at his questioner, and then hardened his face. "I apologize for mentioning it," he said, with brevity. "One does not speak of family affairs."

"I asked you how much it was," pursued Thorpe, in a masterful tone. "A man does n't want to rob a girl of her marriage portion."

"I think I must not answer you," the other replied, hesitatingly. "It was the fault of my emotion to introduce the subject. Pray leave the young lady out of account."

"Then I 've nothing more to say," Thorpe declared, and seated himself again with superfluous energy. He scowled for a little at the disorder of his desk, and then flung forth an angry explanation. "If you evade fair questions like that, how can you expect that I will go out of my way to help you?"

"Oh, permit me, Mr. Thorpe"—the Marquis intervened soothingly—"I think you misapprehend. My friend, I am sure, wished to evade nothing. He had the idea that he was at fault in—in alluding to a purely domestic mat-

ter as—as a—what shall I say?—as a plea for your consideration." He turned to the old banker. "You will not refuse to mention the sum to me, will you, my friend?"

M. Fromentin shrugged his shoulders. "It is ten thousand pounds," he replied, almost curtly.

Thorpe was seemingly mollified. "Very well, then," he said. "I will sell you 2,000 shares at ten pounds."

The others exchanged a wondering look.

"Monsieur," the banker stammered—"I see your meaning. You will forgive me—it is very well meant indeed by you—but it was not my proposition. The market-price is fifteen pounds—and we were prepared to pay it."

Thorpe laughed in a peremptory, gusty way. "But you can't pay more than I ask!" he told him, with rough geniality. "Come, if I let you and your nephew in out of the cold, what kind of men-folk would you be to insist that your niece should be left outside? As I said, I don't want her money. I don't want any woman's money. If I'm going to be nice to the rest of the family, what's the objection to my being nice to her?"

"Monsieur," said the Frenchman, after an instant's reflection, "I offer none. I did not at the moment perceive the spirit of your words, but I recognize now that it was delicacy itself. I tender you the most profound thanks—for *all* the family."

After some further conversation the elder Fromentin took his departure. Lord Chaldon apparently proposed to accompany him, but Thorpe begged him to remain, and he put aside his hat once more and resumed his seat.

Thorpe walked about a little, with his hands in his pockets, in a restless way. "If it is n't unpleasant to you, I think I 'll light a cigar," he said suddenly, and

moved over to the cabinet. He poured out a drink of neat brandy, as well, and furtively swallowed it. Then he came back, preceded by a cloud of smoke.

"It went terribly against the grain," he said, with a rueful laugh. "I 'd sworn to let no Jew off with an inch of hide left on him—and here three of them have been wheedled out of my grip already."

"Jews?" exclaimed the Marquis, much puzzled. "Did you—did you think Fromentin was a Jew? God bless me! he 's no more one than I am! Why, not even so much, for there *is* a Herschell in my pedigree. Why, dear man, they were Crusaders!"

Thorpe smiled somewhat sheepishly. "I never noticed much," he said. "It was a foreign-looking name. I took it for granted."

Lord Chaldon bent his brows a little. "Yes-s"—he murmured, meditatively. "I 've heard it mentioned that your enterprise was suspected of an anti-Semitic twist. Do you mind my talking a little with you about that?"

"Oh, not at all," the other answered with languid acquiescence, as he seated himself.

CHAPTER XVII

LORD CHALDON'S instructive little monologue on the subject of the Hebrew in finance afforded Thorpe a certain pleasure, which was in its character, perhaps, more social than intellectual.

It was both a flattering and striking experience to have so eminent a man at the side of one's desk, revealing for one's guidance the secrets of sovereigns and cabinets. Great names were mentioned in the course of this dissertation—mentioned with the authoritative ease of one who dined with princes and prime ministers—and Thorpe felt that he shared in the distinction of this familiarity with the august. He was in the position of paying a salary to this courtly old nobleman and statesman, who could tell him of his own intimate knowledge how Emperors conversed with one another ; how the Pope fidgeted in his ornate-carved chair when the visitor talked on unwelcome topics ; how a Queen and an opera-bouffe dancer waged an obscure and envenomed battle for the possession of a counting-house strong box, and in the outcome a nation was armed with inferior old muskets instead of modern weapons, and the girl got the difference expressed in black pearls.

These reminiscences seemed to alter the atmosphere, and even the appearance, of the Board Room. It was almost as if the apartment itself was becoming historic, like those chambers they pointed out to the tourist wherein crowned heads had slept. The manner of the Marquis lent itself

charmingly to this illusion. He spoke in a facile, mellifluous voice, and as fluently as if he had been at work for a long time preparing a dissertation on this subject, instead of taking it up now by chance. In his tone, in his gestures, in the sustained friendliness of his facial expressions, there was a palpable desire to please his auditor —and Thorpe gave more heed to this than to the thread of the discourse. The facts that he heard now about the Jewish masters of international finance were doubtless surprising and suggestive to a degree, but somehow they failed to stimulate his imagination. Lord Chaldon's statesmanlike discussion of the uses to which they put this vast power of theirs ; his conviction that on the whole they were beneficent ; his dread of the consequences of any organized attempt to take this power away from them, and put it into other and less capable hands—no doubt it was all very clever and wise, but Thorpe did not care for it.

At the end he nodded, and, with a lumbering movement, altered his position in his chair. The fixed idea of despoiling Rostocker, Aronson, Ganz, Rothfoere, Lewis, and Mendel of their last sixpence had been in no wise affected by this entertaining homily. There appeared to be no need of pretending that it had been. If he knew anything of men and their manners, his titled friend would not object to a change of topic.

" Lord Chaldon," he said abruptly, " we 've talked enough about general matters. While you 're here, we might as well go into the subject of the Company. Our annual meeting is pretty nearly due—but I think it would be better to have it postponed. You see, this extraordinary development of dealing in our shares on the Stock Exchange has occupied my entire attention. There has been no time for arranging the machinery of operations

on our property in Mexico. It 's still there; it 's all right. But for the time being, the operations in London are so much more important. We should have nothing to tell our shareholders, if we brought them together, except that their one-pound shares are worth fifteen pounds, and they know that already."

The Marquis had listened with a shrewdly attentive eye upon the speaker's face. The nervous affection of his eyelids gave him now a minute of blinking leisure in which to frame his comment. "I have not heard that *my* shares are worth fifteen pounds," he said then, with a direct, meaning little smile.

"No," Thorpe laughed, leaning comfortably back in his chair. "That 's what I want to talk to you about. You see, when the Company was started, it was impossible to foresee that this dealing in our ordinary shares would swamp everything else. If things had taken their usual course, and we had paid our attention to Mexico instead of to the London Stock Exchange, my deferred vendor's shares, two thousand of which you hold, would by this time be worth a good bit. As it is, unfortunately, they are outside of the deal. They have nothing to do with the movement of the ordinary shares. But of course you understand all that."

Lord Chaldon assented by an eloquent nod, at once resigned and hopeful.

"Well—that is contrary to all my expectations—and intentions," Thorpe resumed. "I don't want you to suffer by this unlooked-for change in the shape of things. You hold two thousand shares—only by accident they 're the wrong kind of shares. Very well: I 'll make them the right kind of shares. I 'll have a transfer sent to you tomorrow, so that you can return those vendor's shares to me, and in exchange for them I 'll give you two thou-

said fully-paid ordinary shares. You can sell these at once, if you like, or you can hold them on over one more settlement, whichever you please."

"This is very munificent," remarked Lord Chaldon, after an instant's self-communion. His tone was extremely gracious, but he displayed none of the enthusiastic excitement which Thorpe perceived now that he had looked for. The equanimity of Marquises, who were also ex-Ambassadors, was evidently a deeper-rooted affair than he had supposed. This elderly and urbane diplomat took a gift of thirty thousand pounds as he might have accepted a superior cigar.

A brief pause ensued, and was ended by another remark from the nobleman: "I thought for the moment of asking your advice—on this question of selling," he continued. "But it will be put more appropriately, perhaps, in this way: Let me leave it entirely in your hands. Whatever you do will be right. I know so little of these things—and you know so much."

Thorpe put out his lips a trifle, and looked away for an instant in frowning abstraction. "If it were put in that way—I think I should sell," he said. "It 's all right for me to take long chances—it 's my game—but there 's no reason why you should risk things. But let me put it in still another way," he added, with the passing gleam of a new thought over the dull surface of his eye. "What do you say to our making the transaction strictly between ourselves? Here are shares to bearer, in the safe there. I say that two thousand of them are yours: that makes them yours. I give you my cheque for thirty thousand pounds—here, now, if you like—and that makes them mine again. The business is finished and done with—inside this room. Neither of us is to say anything about it to a soul. Does that meet your views?"

The diplomat pondered the proposition—again with a lengthened perturbation of the eyelids. "It would be possible to suggest a variety of objections, if one were of a sophistical turn of mind," he said at last, smilingly reflective. "Yet I see no really insuperable obstacle in the path." He thought upon it further, and went on with an enquiring upward glance directed suddenly at Thorpe: "Is there likely to be any very unpleasant hubbub in the press—when it is known that the annual meeting has been postponed?"

Thorpe shook his head with confidence. "No—you need have no fear of that. The press is all right. It 's the talk of the City, I 'm told—the way I 've managed the press. It is n't often that a man has all three of the papers walking the same chalk-line."

The Marquis considered these remarks with a puzzled air. Then he smiled faintly. "I 'm afraid we 're speaking of different things," he suggested. "Apparently you refer to the financial papers. I had scarcely given them a thought. It does not seem to me that I should mind particularly what they said about me—but I should care a great deal about the other press—the great public press."

"Oh, what do they know about these things?" said Thorpe, lightly. "So far as I can see, they don't know about anything, unless it gets into the police court, or the divorce court, or a court of some kind. They 're the funniest sort of papers I ever saw. Seems as if they did n't think anything was safe to be printed until it had been sworn to. Why anybody should be afraid of them is more than I can see."

"Nevertheless," persisted his Lordship, blandly, "I should greatly dislike any public discussion of our Company's affairs. I hope it is quite clear that that can be avoided."

"Absolutely!" Thorpe told him, with reassuring energy. "Why, discussions don't make themselves. Somebody has to kick before anything gets discussed. And who is to kick here? The public who hold the shares are not likely to complain because they've gone up fifteen hundred or two thousand per cent. And who else has any interest in what the Company, as a Company, does?"

"Ah, that is a question which has occurred to me," said Lord Chaldon, "and I shall be glad if it is already answered. The only people likely to 'kick,' as you put it so simply, would be, I take it, Directors and other officers of the Company who find themselves holding a class of shares which does not participate in the present rise. I speak with some confidence—because I was in that position myself until a few minutes ago—and I don't mind confessing that I had brought myself to contemplate the contingency of ultimately being compelled to—to 'kick' a little. Of course, so far as I am concerned, events have put me in a diametrically different frame of mind. If I came prepared—I won't say to curse, but to—to criticize—I certainly remain to bless. But you see my point. I of course do not know what you have done as regards the other members of the Board."

"I don't care about them," said Thorpe, carelessly. "You are the one that I wished to bring in on the ground-floor. The others don't matter. Of course, I shall do something for them; they shan't be allowed to make trouble—even supposing that it would be in their power to make trouble, which is n't the case. But it won't be done by any means on the same scale that—" he paused abruptly, and the two men tacitly completed his sentence in the glance they exchanged.

The Marquis of Chaldon rose, and took up his hat and

stick. "If you will post it to me—in a registered letter—my town house—please," he remarked, with a charmingly delicate hesitation over the phrases. Then he put out his hand: "I need not say how fully I appreciate your great kindness to my old friend Fromentin. It was a noble action—one I shall always reflect upon with admiration."

"I hope you won't mention it, though," said Thorpe, as they shook hands; "either that or—or anything else."

"I shall preserve the most guarded—the most diplomatic secrecy," his Lordship assured him, as they walked toward the door.

Thorpe opened this door, and stepped aside, with a half bow, to facilitate the exit of the Marquis, who bent gracious acknowledgment of the courtesy. Then, with an abrupt start of surprise, the two men straightened themselves. Directly in front of them, leaning lightly against the brass-rail which guarded the entrance to the Board Room, stood Lord Plowden.

A certain sense of confusion, unwelcome but inevitable, visibly enveloped this chance meeting. The Marquis blinked very hard as he exchanged a fleeting hand-shake with the younger nobleman, and murmured some indistinguishable commonplaces. Then, with a graceful celerity, which was more than diplomatic, he disappeared. Thorpe, with more difficulty, recovered a sort of stolidity of expression that might pass for composure. He in turn gave his hand to the newcomer, and nodded to him, and achieved a doubtful smile.

"Come in!" he said, haltingly. "Where did you drop from? Glad to see you! How are all your people?"

A moment later the young Viscount was seated in the chair which the elderly Marquis had vacated. He presented therein a figure which, in its way, was perhaps as courtly as the other had been—but the way was widely

different. Lord Plowden's fine, lithe form expressed no deference in its easy postures. His handsome face was at no pains to assume conciliatory or ingratiating aspects. His brilliant brown eyes sparkled a confident, buoyant gaze full into the heavy, lethargic countenance of the big man at the desk.

"I have n't bothered you before," he said, tossing his gloves into his hat, and spreading his frock-coat out by its silk lapels. He crossed his legs, and sat back with a comfortable smile. "I knew you were awfully busy—and I kept away as long as I could. But now—well, the truth is—I 'm in rather of a hole. I hope you don't mind my coming."

"Why not at all," said Thorpe, laconically. After a momentary pause he added: "The Marquis has just been consulting me about the postponement of the annual meeting. I suppose you agree with us—that it would be better to put it off. There 's really nothing to report. Of course, you know more about the situation than he does—between ourselves. The shareholders don't want a meeting; it 's enough for them that their shares are worth fifteen or twenty times what they paid for them. And certainly *we* don't need a meeting, as things stand now."

"Ah yes—how do things stand now?" asked Lord Plowden, briskly.

"Well,"—Thorpe eyed his visitor with a moody blankness of gaze, his chin once more buried in his collar—"well, everything is going all right, as far as I can see. But, of course, these dealings in our shares in the City have taken up all my time—so that I have n't been able to give any attention to starting up work in Mexico. That being the case, I shall arrange to foot all the bills for this year's expenses—the rent, the Directors' fees and clerk-hire and so on—out of my own pocket. It comes,

all told, to about £2,750—without counting my extra £1,000 as Managing Director. I don't propose to ask for a penny of that, under the circumstances—and I 'll even pay the other expenses. So that the Company is n't losing a penny by our not getting to work at the development of the property. No one could ask anything fairer than that.—And are your mother and sister quite well?"

"Oh, very well indeed, thanks," replied the other. He relapsed abruptly into a silence which was plainly preoccupied. Something of the radiant cheerfulness with which his face had beamed seemed to have faded away.

"I 'm in treaty for a house and a moor in the Highlands"—Thorpe went on, in a casual tone—"in fact, I 'm hesitating between three or four places that all seem to be pretty good—but I don't know whether I can get away much before the twentieth. I hope you can contrive to come while I 'm there. I should like it very much if you would bring your mother and sister—and your brother too. I have a nephew about his age—a fine young fellow—who 'd be company for him. Why can't you say now that you 'll all come?"

Lord Plowden emerged from his brown study with the gleam of some new idea on his face. "I might bring my sister," he said. "My mother hates Scotland. She does n't go about, either, even in England. But I daresay Winnie would enjoy it immensely. She has a great opinion of you, you know."

"I only saw her that once," Thorpe remarked. Some thought behind his words lent a musing effect to the tone in which they were uttered. The brother's contemplative smile seemed a comment upon this tone.

"Women are curious creatures," he said. "They take fancies and dislikes as swiftly and irresponsibly as cloud-shadows shift and change on a mountain-side in

April. But I happen to know that my sister does like you immensely. So does my mother," he added, with another little smile. He continued to regard Thorpe's face, but there was an increasing uncertainty in his glance. "You 've put on flesh, have n't you?" he ventured, after a brief pause. There was the implication in his voice and manner that he observed changes which disconcerted him.

"Not much, I guess," replied the other, carelessly. "I 've been sticking to the City pretty closely. That 's all. There 's nothing that a fortnight's rest won't put right. I should like it first-rate to have you and your sister come. I 'll let you know which place I decide upon. Very likely you can manage to bring her at the same time that some other ladies will be there. I expect Lady Cressage and Miss Madden, you know."

Lord Plowden stared at his friend. "Are they back? Have they returned to England?" he asked, confusedly.

"Oh, did n't you know?" Thorpe pursued, with an accession of amiability. He visibly had pleasure in the disclosure of the other's ignorance. "They 've been in London for two or three weeks. That is, Miss Madden has been taking flying trips to see cathedrals and so on, but Lady Cressage has stayed in town. Their long journeyings have rather done her up." He looked Plowden straight in the eye, and added with an air of deliberation: "I 'm rather anxious about her health."

The nobleman frankly abandoned his efforts to maintain an undisturbed front. "You—are—anxious," he repeated, frowning in displeased wonderment.

"Why yes—why not?" demanded Thorpe, with a sudden growl in his voice. As he covered the handsome Viscount with his heavy, intent gaze, impulses of wrath stirred within him. Why should this fop of a lordling

put on this air of contemptuous incredulity? "What is there so amazing about that? Why should n't I be anxious?"

The peremptory harshness of his manner, and the scowl on his big, lowering face, brought a sort of self-control back to the other. He shrugged his shoulders, with an attempt at nonchalance. "Why not indeed!" he said, as lightly as he could. With hands on knees, he bent forward as if to rise. "But perhaps I 'd better come in another day," he suggested, tentatively. "I 'm interrupting you."

"No—sit still," Thorpe bade him, and then, with chin settled more determinedly than ever in his cravat, sat eyeing him in a long, dour silence.

Lord Plowden found it impossible to obtain from this massive, apathetic visage any clue to the thoughts working behind it. He chanced to recall the time when he had discussed with Thorpe the meaning and values of this inscrutable expression which the latter's countenance could assume. It had seemed interesting and even admirable to him then—but then he had not foreseen the possibility that he himself might some day confront its adamantine barrier with a sinking heart. All at once he could bear this implacable sphinx-gaze no longer.

"I 'm sure some other day would be better," he urged, with an open overture to propitiation in his tone. "You 're not in the mood to be bothered with my affairs today."

"As much today as any other," Thorpe answered him, slowly.

The other sat suddenly upright—and then upon a moment's reflection rose to his feet. "I don't in the least know what to make of all this," he said, with nervous precipitancy. "If I 've offended you in any way, say so,

and I will apologize at once. But treatment of this sort passes my comprehension."

Thorpe in truth did not himself comprehend it much more clearly. Some strange freak of wilfulness impelled him to pursue this unintelligible persecution. "I 've said nothing about any offense," he declared, in a hard, deliberate voice. "It is your own word. All the same —I mention the name of a lady—a lady, mind you, whom I met under your own roof—and you strike attitudes and put on airs as if—as if I was n't good enough!"

"Oh, upon my word, that 's all rubbish!" the other broke in. "Nothing could have been further from my thoughts, I assure you. Quite naturally I was surprised for the moment at a bit of unexpected news—but that was all. I give you my word that was all."

"Very well, then," Thorpe consented grudgingly to mutter.

He continued his sullen scrutiny of the man standing before him, noting how the vivacity of his bearing had deteriorated in these few minutes. He had cut such a gallant figure when he entered the room, with his sparkling eye and smile, his almost jaunty manner, his superior tailor's plumage—and now he was such a crestfallen and wilted thing! Remembering their last conversation together—remembering indeed how full of liking for this young nobleman he had been when they last met—Thorpe paused to wonder at the fact that he felt no atom of pity for him now. What was his grievance? What had Plowden done to provoke this savage hostility? Thorpe could not tell. He knew only that unnamed forces dragged him forward to hurt and humiliate his former friend. Obscurely, no doubt, there was something about a woman in it. Plowden had been an admirer of Lady Cressage. There was her father's word for it that if there

had been money enough he would have wished to marry her. There had been, as well, the General's hint that if the difficulty of Plowden's poverty were removed, he might still wish to marry her—a hint which Thorpe discovered to be rankling with a sudden new soreness in his mind. Was that why he hated Plowden? No—he said to himself that it was not. He was going to marry Lady Cressage himself. Her letter, signifying delicately her assent to his proposal, had come to him that very morning—was in his pocket now. What did he care about the bye-gone aspirations of other would-be suitors? And, as for Plowden, he had not even known of her return to London. Clearly there remained no communications of any sort between them. It was not at all on her account, he assured himself, that he had turned against Plowden. But what other reason could there be? He observed his visitor's perturbed and dejected mien with a grim kind of satisfaction—but still he could not tell why.

"This is all terribly important to me," the nobleman said, breaking the unpleasant silence. His voice was surcharged with earnestness. "Apparently you are annoyed with something—what it may be I can't for the life of me make out. All I can say is"—and he broke off with a helpless gesture which seemed to imply that he feared to say anything.

Thorpe put out his lips. "I don't know what you mean," he said, brusquely.

"What I mean"—the other echoed, with bewildered vagueness of glance. "I 'm all at sea. I don't in the least grasp the meaning of anything. You yourself volunteered the declaration that you would do great things for me. 'We are rich men together'—those were your own words. I urged you at the time to go slowly—to consider carefully whether you were n't being too

generous. I myself said to you that you were ridiculously exaggerating what you called your obligation to me. It was you who insisted upon presenting me with 100,000 shares."

"Well, they are here ready for you," said Thorpe, with calculated coldness. "You can have them whenever you please. I promised them to you, and set them aside for you. You can take them away with you now, if you like. What are you kicking up this fuss for, then? Upon my word!—you come here and suggest to me that I made promises to you which I 've broken!"

Plowden looked hard at him, as he turned over in his mind the purport of these words. "I see what you are doing," he said then. "You turn over to me 100,000 vendor's deferred shares. Thanks! I have already 1,000 of them. I keep them in the same box with my father's Confederate bonds."

"What the hell do you mean?" Thorpe broke in with explosive warmth, lifting himself in his chair.

"Oh, come now, Thorpe," Plowden retorted, "let 's get this talk on an intelligent, common-sense footing." He had regained something of his self-control, and keenly put forward now to help him all his persuasive graces of eye and speech. He seated himself once more. "I 'm convinced that you want to be good to me. Of course you do! If I 've seemed here for a minute or two to think otherwise, it was because I misunderstood things. Don't let there be any further misunderstandings! I apologize for doing you the momentary injustice of suspecting that you were going to play off the vendor's shares on me. Of course you said it—but it was a joke."

"There seems to be a joke somewhere, sure enough," said Thorpe, in dryly metallic tones—"but it is n't me who 's the joker. I told you you should have 100,000 of

my 400,000 shares, did n't I ? I told you that in so many words. Very well, what more do you want ? Here they are for you ! I keep my promise to the letter. But you —you seem to think you 're entitled to make a row. What do you mean by it ? "

" Just a little word "—interposed Plowden, with strenuous calmness of utterance—" what you say may be true enough—yes, I admit it is true as far as it goes. But was that what either of us had in our minds at the time ? You know it was n't ! You had just planned a *coup* on the Stock Exchange which promised you immense rewards. I helped you to pass a bogus allotment through our Board —without which your *coup* would n't have been worth a farthing. You were enthusiastically grateful to me then. In the excitement of the moment you promised me a quarter of all you should make. *' We are both rich men ! '* I remember those very words of yours. They have never been out of my mind. We discussed the things that we would each do, when we came into this wealth. It was taken for granted in all our talk that your making money meant also my making money. That was the complete understanding—here in London, and while you were at my house. You know it as well as I do. And I refuse to suppose that you seriously intend to sit there and pretend that you meant to give me nothing but an armful of waste paper. It would be too monstrous ! "

Thorpe rapped with his nails on the desk, to point the force of his rejoinder : " How do you account for the fact, my Lord "—he gave his words a chillingly scornful precision of utterance—" that I distinctly mentioned 400,000 vendor's shares of mine, 100,000 of which I promised to turn over to you ? Those were the specific terms, were they not ? You don't deny it ? Then what are you talking about ? "

"I account for it in this way"—said Plowden, after a moment's baffled reflection: "at that time you yourself had n't grasped the difference between the two classes of shares. You thought the vendor's shares would play a part in the game. Ah! I see I 've hit the mark! That was the way of it!—And now here, Thorpe! Let all that 's been said be bye-gones! I don't want any verbal triumph over you. You don't want to wrong me—and yourself too—by sticking to this quibble about vendor's shares. You intended to be deuced good to me—and what have I done that you should round on me now? I have n't bothered you before. I came today only because things are particularly rotten, financially, just now. And I don't even want to hold you to a quarter—I leave that entirely to you. But after all that 's been said and done—I put it to you as one man to another—you are morally bound to help me out."

"How do you mean?—'all that 's been said and done'?" Thorpe asked the question in some confusion of moods. Perhaps it was the ethical force of Lord Plowden's appeal, perhaps only a recurring sense of his earlier affection for the man—but for the moment he wavered in his purpose.

The peer flushed a little, as he looked at the floor, revolving possible answers to this query. His ear had been quick to seize the note of hesitation in Thorpe's tone. He strove anxiously to get together considerations which should tip the fluttering balance definitely his way.

"Well," he began slowly, "I hardly know how to put it. Of course there was, in the first place, the immense expectation of fortune which you gave me, and which I 'm afraid I 've more than lived up to. And then, of course, others shared my expectations. It was n't a thing one

could very well keep to oneself. My mother and my sister—especially my sister—they were wonderfully excited about it. You are quite the hero in their eyes. And then—you remember that talk we had, in which you said I could help you—socially, you know. I did it a little, just as a start, but of course there 's no end to what could be done. You 've been too busy heretofore, but we can begin now whenever you like. I don't mind telling you—I 've had some thoughts of a possible marriage for you. In point of blood and connections it would be such a match as a commoner has n't made before in my memory—a highly-cultivated and highly-bred young lady of rank—and settlements could be made so that a considerable quantity of land would eventually come to your son. I need n't tell you that land stands for much more than money, if you happen to set your mind on a baronetcy or a peerage. Of course—I need scarcely say—I mention this marriage only as something which may or may not attract you,—it is quite open to you to prefer another,—but there is hardly anything of that sort in which I and my connections could not be of use to you."

Even more by the tone and inflection of these words than by the phrases themselves, Thorpe divined that he was being offered the hand of the Hon. Winifred Plowden in marriage. He recalled vividly the fact that once the shadow of some such thought had floated through his own brain ; there had been a moment—it seemed curiously remote, like a dream-phantom from some previous state of existence—when he had dwelt with personal interest upon her inheritance from long lines of noblemen, and her relation to half the peerage. Then, swiftly, illogically, he disliked the brother of this lady more than ever.

" All that is talking in the air," he said, with abrupt decision. " I see nothing in it. You shall have your

vendor's shares, precisely as I promised you. I don't see how you can possibly ask for anything more." He looked at the other's darkling face for a moment, and then rose with unwieldy deliberation. "If you 're so hard up though," he continued, coldly, "I don't mind doing this much for you. I 'll exchange the thousand vendor's shares you already hold—the ones I gave you to qualify you at the beginning—for ordinary shares. You can sell those for fifteen thousand pounds cash. In fact, I 'll buy them of you now. I 'll give you a cheque for the amount. Do you want it?"

Lord Plowden, red-faced and frowning, hesitated for a fraction of time. Then in constrained silence he nodded, and Thorpe, leaning ponderously over the desk, wrote out the cheque. His Lordship took it, folded it up, and put it in his pocket without immediate comment.

"Then this is the end of things, is it?" he asked, after an awkward silence, in a voice he strove in vain to keep from shaking.

"What things?" said the other.

Plowden shrugged his shoulders, framed his lips to utter something which he decided not to say, and at last turned on his heel. "Good day," he called out over his shoulder, and left the room with a flagrant air of hostility.

Thorpe, wandering about the apartment, stopped after a time at the cabinet, and helped himself to a drink. The thing most apparent to him was that of set purpose he had converted a friend into an enemy. Why had he done this? He asked himself the question in varying forms, over his brandy and soda, but no convincing answer came. He had done it because he had felt like doing it. It was impossible to trace motives further than that.

CHAPTER XVIII

"EDITH will be down in a very few moments," Miss Madden assured Thorpe that evening, when he entered the drawing-room of the house she had taken in Grafton Street.

He looked into her eyes and smiled, as he bowed over the hand she extended to him. His glance expressed with forceful directness his thought: "Ah, then she has told you!"

The complacent consciousness of producing a fine effect in evening-clothes had given to Mr. Stormont Thorpe habitually now a mildness of manner, after the dressing hour, which was lacking to his deportment in the daytime. The conventional attire of ceremony, juggled in the hands of an inspired tailor, had been brought to lend to his ponderous figure a dignity, and even something of a grace, which the man within assimilated and made his own. It was an equable and rather amiable Thorpe whom people encountered after nightfall—a gentleman who looked impressive enough to have powerful performances believed of him, yet seemed withal an approachable and easy-going person. Men who saw him at midnight or later spoke of him to their womenkind with a certain significant reserve, in which trained womankind read the suggestion that the "Rubber King" drank a good deal, and was probably not wholly nice in his cups.

This, however, could not be said to render him less interesting in any eyes. There was indeed about it the im-

plication of a generous nature, or at the least of a blind side —and it is not unpleasant to discover these attributes in a new man who has made his half-million, and has, or may have, countless favours to bestow.

It was as if his tongue instead of his eyes had uttered the exclamation—"Ah, then she has told you!"—for Miss Madden took it as having been spoken.

"I 'm not disposed to pretend that I 'm overjoyed about it, you know," she said to him bluntly, as their hands dropped, and they stood facing each other. "If I said I congratulated you, it would be only the emptiest form. And I hate empty forms."

"Why should you think that I won't make a good husband?" Thorpe asked the question with a good-natured if peremptory frankness which came most readily to him in the presence of this American lady, herself so outspoken and masterful.

"I don't know that I specially doubt it," she replied. "I suppose any man has in him the makings of what is called a good husband—if the conditions are sufficiently propitious."

"Well then—what 's the matter with the conditions?" he demanded, jocosely.

Miss Madden shrugged her shoulders slightly. Thorpe noted the somewhat luxuriant curves of these splendid shoulders, and the creamy whiteness of the skin, upon which, round the full throat, a chain of diamonds lay as upon satin—and recalled that he had not seen her before in what he phrased to himself as so much low-necked dress. The deep fire-gleam in her broad plaits of hair gave a wonderful brilliancy to this colouring of brow and throat and bosom. He marvelled at himself for discovering only now that she also was beautiful—and then thrilled with pride at the thought that henceforth his life

might be passed altogether among beautiful women, radiant in gems and costly fabrics, who would smile upon him at his command.

"Oh, I have no wish to be a kill-joy," she protested. "I 'm sure I hope all manner of good results from the—the experiment."

"I suppose that 's what it comes to," he said, meditatively. "It 's all an experiment. Every marriage in the world must be that—neither more nor less."

"With all the experience of the ages against its coming out right." She had turned to move toward a chair, but looked now over her shoulder at him. "Have you ever seen what seemed to you an absolutely happy marriage in your life?"

Upon reflection he shook his head. "I don't recall one on the spur of the minute," he confessed. "Not the kind, I mean, that you read about in books. But I 've seen plenty where the couple got along together in a good, easy, comfortable sort of way, without a notion of any sort of unpleasantness. It 's people who marry too young who do most of the fighting, I imagine. After people have got to a sensible age, and know what they want and what they can get along without, why then there 's no reason for any trouble. *We* don't start out with any school-boy and school-girl moonshine——"

"Oh, there 's a good deal to be said for the moonshine," she interrupted him, as she sank upon the sofa.

"Why certainly," he assented, amiably, as he stood looking down at her. "The more there is of it, the better—if it comes naturally, and people know enough to understand that it *is* moonshine, and is n't the be-all and end-all of everything."

"There 's a lover for you!" Miss Madden cried, with mirth and derision mingled in her laugh.

"Don't you worry about me," he told her. "I 'm a good enough lover, all right. And when you come to that, if Edith is satisfied, I don't precisely see what——"

"What business it is of mine?" she finished the sentence for him. "You 're entirely right. As you say, *if* she 's satisfied, no one else has anything to do with it."

"But have you got any right to assume that she is n't satisfied?" he asked her with swift directness—"or any reason for supposing it?"

Miss Madden shook her head, but the negation seemed qualified by the whimsical smile she gave him. "None whatever," she said—and on the instant the talk was extinguished by the entrance of Lady Cressage.

Thorpe's vision was flooded with the perception of his rare fortune as he went to meet her. He took the hand she offered, and looked into the smile of her greeting, and could say nothing. Her beauty had gathered to it new forces in his eyes—forces which dazzled and troubled his glance. The thought that this exquisite being—this ineffable compound of feeling and fine nerves and sweet wisdom and wit and loveliness—belonged to him seemed too vast for the capacity of his mind. He could not keep himself from trembling a little, and from diverting to a screen beyond her shoulder a gaze which he felt to be overtly dimmed and embarrassed.

"I have kept you waiting," she murmured.

The soft sound of her voice came to his ears as from a distance. It bore an unfamiliar note, upon the strangeness of which he dwelt for a detached instant. Then its meaning broke in upon his consciousness from all sides, and lighted up his heavy face with the glow of a conqueror's self-centred smile. He bent his eyes upon her, and noted with a controlled exaltation how her glance in turn deferred to his, and fluttered beneath it, and shrank

away. He squared his big shoulders and lifted his head. Still holding her jewelled hand in his, he turned and led her toward the sofa. Halting, he bowed with an exaggerated genuflection and flourish of his free hand to Miss Madden, the while he flashed at her a glance at once of challenge and of deprecation. Through the sensitized contact of the other hand, he felt that the woman he held bowed also, and in his own spirit of confused defiance and entreaty. The laugh he gave then seemed to dispel the awkwardness which had momentarily hung over the mocking salutation.

Miss Madden laughed too. "Oh, I surrender," she said. "You drag congratulations from me."

Some quality in the tone of this ungracious speech had the effect of putting the party at its ease. Lady Cressage seated herself beside her friend on the sofa, and gently, abstractedly, patted one of her hands. Thorpe remained on his feet, looking down at the pair with satisfied cheerfulness. He took a slip of paper from his pocket, to support a statement he was making.

"I 'm forever telling you what a strain the City is on a man in my position," he said—"and today I had the curiosity to keep an account of what happened. Here it is. I had thirty callers. Of those, how many do you suppose came to see me on my own business? Just eight. That is to say, their errands were about investments of mine, but most of them managed to get in some word about axes of their own to grind. All the rest made no pretence at all of thinking about anybody but themselves. I 've classified them, one by one, here.

"First, there were six men who wanted me to take shares of one sort or another, and I had to more or less listen to what they tried to make out their companies were like. They were none of them any good. Eight

different fellows came to me with schemes that have n't reached the company stage. One had a scheme for getting possession of a nigger republic in the West Indies by raising a loan, and then repudiating all the previous loans. Another wanted me to buy a paper for him, in which he was to support all my enterprises. Another wanted to start a bank—I apparently to find the money, and he the brains. One chap wanted me to finance a theatrical syndicate—he had a bag full of photographs of an actress all eyes and teeth and hair,—and another chap had a scheme all worked out for getting a concession from Spain for one of the Caroline Islands, and putting up a factory there for making porpoise-hide leather.

"Then there were three inventors—let 's see, here they are—one with a coiled wire spring for scissors inside a pocket-knife, and one with a bottle, the whole top of which unscrews instead of having a cork or stopper, and one with an electrical fish-line, a fine wire inside the silk, you know, which connects with some battery when a fish bites, and rings a bell, and throws out hooks in various directions, and does all sorts of things.

"Well then, there was a man who wanted me to take the chairmanship of a company, and one who wanted me to guarantee an overdraft at his bank, and two who wanted to borrow money on stock, and one parson-fellow who tried to stick me for a subscription to some Home or other he said he had for children in the country. He was the worst bounder of the lot.

"Well, there 's twenty-seven people—and twenty of them strangers to me, and not worth a penny to me, and all trying to get money out of me. Is n't that a dog's life for one?"

"I don't know," said Miss Madden, contemplatively. "A lady may have twice that number of callers in an

afternoon—quite as great strangers to all intents and purposes—and not even have the satisfaction of discovering that they had any object whatever in calling. At least your people had some motive: the grey matter in their brain was working. And besides, one of them might have had something to say which you would value. I don't think that ever happens among a lady's callers; does it, Edith?"

Edith smiled, pleasantly and yet a little wistfully, but said nothing.

"At any rate," Thorpe went on, with a kind of purpose gathering in his eyes, "none of those fellows cost me anything, except in time. But then I had three callers, almost in a bunch, and one of them took out of me thirty thousand pounds, and another fifteen thousand pounds, and the third—an utter stranger he was—he got an absolute gratuity of ten thousand pounds, besides my consent to a sale which, if I had refused it, would have stood me in perhaps forty or fifty thousand pounds more. You ladies may thank your stars you don't have that kind of callers!"

The sound of these figures in the air brought a constrained look to the faces of the women. Seemingly they confronted a subject which was not to their liking. The American, however, after a moment's pause, took it up in an indifferent manner.

"You speak of an 'absolute gratuity.' I know nothing of London City methods—but is n't ten thousand pounds a gratuity on a rather large scale?"

Thorpe hesitated briefly, then smiled, and, with slow deliberation, drew up a chair and seated himself before them. "Perhaps I don't mind telling you about it," he began, and paused again. "I had a letter in my mail this morning," he went on at last, giving a sentimental

significance to both tone and glance—"a letter which changed everything in the world for me, and made me the proudest and happiest man above ground. And I put that letter in my pocket, right here on the left side—and it 's there now, for that matter"—he put his hand to his breast, as if under the impulse to verify his words by the production of the missive, and then stopped and flushed.

The ladies, watching him, seemed by their eyes to condone the mawkishness of the demonstration which had tempted him. There was indeed a kind of approving interest in their joint regard, which he had not experienced before.

"I had it in my pocket," he resumed, with an accession of mellow emotion in his voice, "and none of the callers ever got my thoughts very far from that letter. And one of these was an old man—a French banker who must be seventy years old, but dyes his hair a kind of purple black—and it seems that his nephew had got the firm into a terrible kind of scrape, selling 2,000 of my shares when he had n't got them to sell and could n't get them—and the old man came to beg me to let him out at present market figures. He got Lord Chaldon—he 's my Chairman, you know—to bring him, and introduce him as his friend, and plead for him—but I don't think all that, by itself, would have budged me an atom. But then the old man told how he was just able to scrape together money enough to buy the shares he needed, at the ruling price, and he happened to mention that his niece's marriage portion would have to be sacrificed. Well, then, do you know, that letter in my pocket said something to me. . . . And—well, that 's the story. The girl's portion, I wormed it out of him, was ten thousand . . . and I struck that much off the figure that I allowed him to buy his

shares, and save his firm, for. . . . It was all the letter that did it, mind you!"

He concluded the halting narrative amid a marked silence. The ladies looked at him and at each other, but they seemed surprised out of their facility of comment. In this kind of flustered hush, the door was opened and dinner was announced.

Miss Madden welcomed the diversion by rising with ostentatious vigour. "I will take myself out," she declared, with cheerful promptness leading the way. Lady Cressage took the arm Thorpe offered her, and gave no token of comprehending that her wrist was being caressingly pressed against his side as they moved along.

At the little table shining in the centre of the dark, cool dining-room, talk moved idly about among general topics. A thunder-storm broke over the town, at an early stage of the dinner, and the sound of the rushing downpour through the open windows, and the breath of freshness which stirred the jaded air, were pleasanter than any speech. Thoughts roved intuitively country-ward, where the long-needed rain would be dowering the landscape with new life—where the earth at sunrise would be green again, and buoyant in reawakened energy, and redolent with the perfumes of sweetest summer. They spoke of the fields and the moors with the longing of tired townfolk in August.

"Oh, when I get away"—said Thorpe, fervently, "it seems to me that I don't want ever to come back. These last few weeks have got terribly on my nerve. And really—why should I come back? I've been asking myself the question—more today than ever before. Of course everything has been different today. But if I'm to get any genuine good out of my—my fortune—I must pull away from the City altogether sometime—and why not

now? Of course, some important things are still open—and they have to be watched night and day—but after all, Semple—that 's my Broker—he could do it for me. At the most, it won't last more than another six weeks. There is a settlement-day next week, the 15th, and another a fortnight after, on the 29th, and another on September 12th. Well, those three days, if they 're worked as I intend they shall be, and nothing unforeseen happens, will bring in over four hundred thousand pounds, and close the 'corner' in Rubber Consols for good. Then I need never see the City again, thank God! And for that matter—why, what is six weeks? It 's like to-morrow. I 'm going to act as if I were free already. The rain fills me full of the country. Will you both come with me tomorrow or next day, and see the Pellesley place in Hertfordshire? By the photographs it 's the best thing in the market. The newest parts of it are Tudor—and that 's what I 've always wanted."

"How unexpected you are!" commented Miss Madden. "You are almost the last person I should have looked to for a sentiment about Tudor foundations."

Thorpe put out his lips a trifle. "Ah, you don't know me," he replied, in a voice milder than his look had promised. "Because I 'm rough and practical, you must n't think I don't know good things when I see them. Why, all the world is going to have living proof very soon"—he paused, and sent a smile surcharged with meaning toward the silent member of the trio—"living proof that I 'm the greatest judge of perfection in beauty of my time."

He lifted his glass as he spoke, and the ladies accepted with an inclination of the head, and a touch of the wine at their lips, his tacit toast.

"Oh, I think I do know you," said Celia Madden,

calmly discursive. "Up to a certain point, you are not so unlike other men. If people appeal to your imagination, and do not contradict you, or bore you, or get in your way, you are capable of being very nice indeed to them. But that is n't a very uncommon quality. What is uncommon in you—at least that is my reading—is something which according to circumstances may be nice, or very much the other way about. It 's something which stands quite apart from standards of morals or ethics or the ordinary emotions. But I don't know whether it is desirable for me to enter into this extremely personal analysis."

"Oh yes, go on," Thorpe urged her. He watched her face with an almost excited interest.

"Well—I should say that you possessed a capacity for sudden and capricious action in large matters, equally impatient of reasoning and indifferent to consequences, which might be very awkward, and even tragic, to people who happened to annoy you, or stand in your road. You have the kind of organization in which, within a second, without any warning or reason, a passing whim may have worked itself up into an imperative law—something you must obey."

The man smiled and nodded approvingly: "You 've got me down fine," he said.

"I talk with a good deal of confidence," she went on, with a cheerless, ruminative little laugh, "because it is my own organization that I am describing, too. The difference is that I was allowed to exploit my capacity for mischief very early. I had my own way in my teens—my own money, my own power—of course only of a certain sort, and in a very small place. But I know what I did with that power. I spread trouble and misery about me—always of course on a small scale. Then a group of

things happened in a kind of climax—a very painful climax—and it shook the nonsense out of me. My brother and my father died—some other sobering things happened . . . and luckily I was still young enough to stop short, and take stock of myself, and say that there were certain paths I would never set foot on again—and stick to it. But with you—do you see?—power only comes to you when you are a mature man. Experiences, no matter how unpleasant they are, will not change you now. You will not be moved by this occurrence or that to distrust yourself, or reconsider your methods, or form new resolutions. Oh no! Power will be terrible in your hands, if people whom you can injure provoke you to cruel courses——"

"Oh, dear—dear!" broke in Lady Cressage. "What a distressing Mrs. Gummidge-Cassandra you are, Celia! Pray stop it!"

"No—she 's right enough," said Thorpe, gravely. "That 's the kind of man I am."

He seemed so profoundly interested in the contemplation of this portrait which had been drawn of him, that the others respected his reflective silence. He sat for some moments, idly fingering a fork on the table, and staring at a blotch of vivid red projected through a decanter upon the cloth.

"It seems to me that 's the only kind of man it 's worth while to be," he added at last, still speaking with thoughtful deliberation. "There 's nothing else in the world so big as power—strength. If you have that, you can get everything else. But if you have it, and don't use it, then it rusts and decays on your hands. It 's like a thoroughbred horse. You can't keep it idle in the stable. If you don't exercise it, you lose it."

He appeared to be commenting upon some illustration

which had occurred to his own mind, but was not visible to his auditors. While they regarded him, he was prompted to admit them to his confidence.

"There was a case of it today," he said, and then paused.

"Precisely," put in Miss Madden. "The fact that some Frenchwoman, of whom you had never heard before, was going to lose her marriage portion caught your attention, and on the instant you presented her with $50,000, an exercise of power which happens to be on the generous side—but still entirely unreasoning, and not deserving of any intellectual respect. And here 's the point: if it had happened that somebody else chanced to produce an opposite impression upon you, you would have been capable of taking $50,000 away from him with just as light a heart."

Thorpe's face beamed with repressed amusement. "As a matter of fact it was that kind of case I was going to mention. I was n't referring to the girl and her marriage portion. A young man came to me today—came into my room all cock-a-whoop, smiling to himself with the notion that he had only to name what he wanted, and I would give it to him—and ——"

He stopped abruptly, with a confused little laugh. He had been upon the brink of telling about Lord Plowden's discomfiture, and even now the story itched upon his tongue. It cost him an effort to put the narrative aside, the while he pondered the arguments which had suddenly reared themselves against publicity. When at last he spoke, it was with a glance of conscious magnanimity toward the lady who had consented to be his wife.

"Never mind," he said, lightly. "There was n't much to it. The man annoyed me, somehow—and he did n't get what he came for—that 's all."

"But he was entitled to get it?" asked Celia Madden.

Thorpe's lips pouted over a reply. "Well—no," he said, with a kind of reluctance. "He got strictly what he was entitled to—precisely what I had promised him—and he wrung up his nose at that—and then I actually gave him £15,000 he was n't entitled to at all."

"I hardly see what it proves, then," Edith Cressage remarked, and the subject was dropped.

Some two hours later, Thorpe took his departure. It was not until he was getting into the hansom which had been summoned, that it all at once occurred to him that he had not for a moment been alone with his betrothed. Upon reflection, as the cab sped smoothly forward, this seemed odd to him. He decided finally that there was probably some social rule about such things which he did n't understand.

. . . . . .

In the drawing-room of the house in Grafton Street which he had quitted, the two ladies sat with faces averted from each other, in constrained silence.

Edith Cressage rose at last, and took a few aimless steps, with her hands at her hair. "Well—I 'm embarked—fairly under way!" she said, in clear-cut, almost provocative tones.

"I don't at all know what to say," her companion replied, slowly. "I fancy that you exaggerate my disapproval. Perhaps it ought not even to be called disapproval at all. It is only that I am puzzled—and a little frightened."

"Oh, I am frightened too," said the other, but with eagerness rather than trepidation in her voice. "That is why I did not give you the signal to leave us alone. I could n't quite get up the nerve for it. But would you believe it?—that is one of the charms of the thing. There

is an excitement about it that exhilarates me. To get happiness through terror—you can't understand that, can you?"

"I 'm trying. I think I 'm beginning to understand," said Miss Madden, vaguely.

"Did you ever set yourself to comprehending why Marie Stuart married Bothwell?" asked Edith, looking down upon the other with illuminating fixity. "You have it all—all there. Marie got tired of the smooth people, the usual people. There was the promise of adventure, and risk, and peril, and the grand emotions with the big, dark brute."

"It is n't a happy story—this parallel that you pick out," commented Celia, absently.

"Happy! Pah!" retorted Edith, with spirit. "Who knows if it was n't the only really happy thing in her life? The snobs and prigs all scold her and preach sermons at her—they did it in her lifetime: they do it now——"

"Oh come, I 'm neither a snob nor a prig," put in Celia, looking up in her turn, and tempering with a smile the energy of her tone—"I don't blame her for her Bothwell; I don't criticize her. I never was even able to mind about her killing Darnley. You see I take an extremely liberal view. One might almost call it broad. But if I had been one of her ladies—her bosom friends—say Catherine Seton—and she had talked with me about it—I think I should have confessed to some forebodings—some little misgivings."

"And do you know what she would have said?" Edith's swift question, put with a glowing face and a confident voice, had in it the ring of assured triumph. "She would have answered you: 'My dearest girl, all my life I have done what other people told me to do. In my

childhood I was given in marriage to a criminal idiot. In my premature widowhood I was governed by a committee of scoundrels of both sexes until another criminal idiot was imposed upon me as a second husband. My own personality has never had the gleam of a chance. I have never yet done any single thing because I wanted to do it. Between first my politician-mother and her band of tonsured swindlers, and then my cantankerous brother and his crew of snarling and sour-minded preachers, and all the court liars and parasites and spies that both sides surrounded me with, I have lived an existence that is n't life at all. I purport to be a woman, but I have never been suffered to see a genuine man. And now here *is* one—or what I think to be one—and I 'm given to understand that he is a pirate and a murderer and an unspeakable ruffian generally—but he takes my fancy, and he has beckoned to me to come to him, and so you will kindly get me my hat and jacket and gloves.' *That's* what she would have said to you, my dear."

"And I"—said Celia, rising after a moment's pause, and putting her hand upon Edith's arm—"I would have answered, 'Dearest lady, in whatever befalls, I pray you never to forget that I am to the end your fond and devoted and loyal servant.'"

CHAPTER XIX

AUGUST wore itself out in parched tedium, and a September began which seemed even more unbearable in town,—and still Thorpe did not get away from London.

So far as the payment of an exorbitant rent in advance, and the receipt of innumerable letters from a restless and fussy steward whom he had not yet seen, went as evidence, he knew himself to be the tenant in possession of a great shooting in Morayshire. He had several photographs of what was called the lodge, but looked like something between a mansion and a baronial castle, on the mantel of the Board Room. The reflection that this sumptuous residence had been his for a month, and that it daily stood waiting for him, furnished and swept and provisioned for his coming, did nothing to help the passing of time in the hot, fagged City. More than once he had said resolutely that, on the morrow, or at the worst the next day, he would go—but in the event he had not gone. In the last week of August he had proceeded to the length of sending his niece and nephew Northward, and shutting up the house in Ovington Square, and betaking himself to the Savoy Hotel. This had appeared at the time to be almost equivalent to his getting away himself,—to be at least a first stage in the progress of his own journey. But at the hotel he had stuck fast,—and now, on the tenth of September, was no nearer the moors and the deer-forest than he had been a month before.

A novel sense of loneliness,—of the fatuity of present

existence,—weighed grievously upon him. The ladies of Grafton Street had left town upon a comprehensive itinerary of visits which included the Malvern country, and a ducal castle in Shropshire, and a place in Westmoreland. There was nothing very definite about the date of their coming to him in Scotland. The lady who had consented to marry him had, somehow, omitted to promise that she would write to him. An arrangement existed, instead, by which she and his niece Julia were to correspond, and to fix between themselves the details of the visit to Morayshire.

Thorpe hardly went to the point of annoyance with this arrangement. He was conscious of no deep impulse to write love-letters himself, and there was nothing in the situation which made his failure to receive love-letters seem unnatural. The absence of moonshine, at least during this preliminary season, had been quite taken for granted between them, and he did not complain even to himself. There was even a kind of proud satisfaction for him in the thought that, though he had all but completed the purchase of the noble Pellesley estate for Edith Cressage, he had never yet kissed her. The reserve he imposed upon himself gave him a certain aristocratic fineness in his own eyes. It was the means by which he could feel himself to be most nearly her equal. But he remained very lonely in London, none the less.

It is true that a great deal of society was continually offered to him, and even thrust upon him. In the popular phrase, London was empty, but there seemed to be more people than ever who desired Mr. Stormont Thorpe's presence at their dinner-tables, or their little theatre or card or river parties. He clung sullenly to his rule of going nowhere, but it was not so simple a matter to evade the civilities and importunities of those who were stopping

at the hotel, or who came there to waylay him at the entrance, or to encounter him in the restaurant. He could not always refuse to sit down at tables when attractively-dressed and vivacious women made room for him, or to linger over cigars and wine with their husbands and escorts later on.

An incessant and spirited court was paid to him by many different groups of interested people who were rarely at the pains to dissemble their aims. He formed a manner for the reception of these advances, compounded of joviality, cynicism, and frank brutality, which nobody, to his face at least, resented. If women winced under his mocking rudenesses of speech and smile, if men longed to kill him for the cold insolence of his refusal to let them inside his guard, they sedulously kept it from him. The consciousness that everybody was afraid of him,—that everybody would kneel to him, and meekly take insult and ignominy from him, if only hope remained to them of getting something out of him,—hardened like a crust upon his mind.

It was impossible to get a sense of companionship from people who cringed to him, and swallowed his affronts and cackled at his jokes with equal docility. Sometimes he had a passing amusement in the rough pleasantries and cruelties which they drew from him. There were two or three bright Jewish women, more gayly clever and impudent, perhaps, than beautiful, with whom he found it genuine fun to talk, and concerning whom he was perpetually conceiving projects which could not have been discussed with their husbands, and as perpetually doing nothing to test their feasibility. But these diversions were in their essence unsubstantial. There was not even the semblance of a real friendship among them,—and loneliness became an increasing burden.

His sister at the old book-shop exasperated him nowadays to a degree which often provoked within him the resolution to have done with her. He had a score of projects for her betterment, each capable of as many variations and eager adaptations to suit her fancy, but to them all and sundry she opposed a barrier of stupidly passive negation. There was nothing she wanted done for her. She would not exchange the work she had been brought up in for a life of idleness. She did not want, and would not know what to do with, a bigger shop than she had. An augmentation of her capital would be of no use, because there was no room in the crowded little shop for a larger stock than it contained. She was entirely satisfied with the dingy home overhead, and declined to think even of moving elsewhere. Over and over again she met his propositions with a saying which he could recall having particularly hated on their father's lips,—"It 's ill teaching an old dog new tricks."

"You ought to have them taught you with a stick," he had told her roundly, on the last occasion.

She had merely shrugged her gaunt shoulders at him. "You think you can bully everybody and make them crawl to you,—but there 's no good your trying it on with me," she had told him, and he had pushed his way out of the shop almost stamping his feet. It was clear to him at that moment that he would never darken her door again.

Yet now, on this afternoon of the tenth, as he lounged with a cigar and a City paper in his apartment at the hotel after luncheon, wondering whether it were too hot to issue forth for a walk to the Park, the irrelevant idea of going round to see his sister kept coming into his mind. He seated himself and fastened his attention upon the paper, —but off it slipped again to the old book-shop, and to

"AN OLD MAN . . . HAD BEEN ALLOWED TO ENTER THE ROOM UNANNOUNCED."—*Page 279.*

that curious, cross-grained figure, its mistress. He abandoned himself to thinking about her—and discovered that a certain unique quality in her challenged his admiration. She was the only absolutely disinterested person he knew—the only creature in the world, apparently, who did not desire to make something out of him. She was not at all well-off,—was indeed rather poor than otherwise,—and here was her only brother a millionaire, and in her dumb way she had a sisterly affection for him, and yet she could not be argued or cajoled into touching a penny of his money. Surely there could be no other woman like her.

Thorpe realized that it was a distinction to have such a sister,—and behind this thought rose obscurely the suggestion that there must be wonderful blood in a race which had produced such a daughter. And for that matter, such a son too! He lifted his head, and looked abstractedly before him, as if he were gazing at some apotheosis of himself in a mirror.

He beheld all at once something concrete and personal, obtruded into the heart of his reverie, the sight of which dimly astounded him. For the moment, with opened lips he stared at it,—then slowly brought himself to comprehend what had happened. An old man had by some oversight of the hotel servants been allowed to enter the room unannounced. He had wandered in noiselessly, and had moved in a purblind fashion to the centre of the apartment. The vagueness of the expression on his face and of his movements hinted at a vacant mind or too much drink,—but Thorpe gave no thought to either hypothesis. The face itself—no—yes—it was the face of old Tavender.

"In the name of God! What are you doing here?" Thorpe gasped at this extraordinary apparition. Still

staring, he began to push back his chair and put his weight upon his feet.

"Well—Thorpe"—the other began, thrusting forward his head to look through his spectacles—"so it is you, after all. I did n't know whether I was going to find you or not. This place has got so many turns and twists to it——"

"But good heavens!" interposed the bewildered Thorpe. He had risen to his feet. He mechanically took the hand which the other had extended to him. "What in hell"—he began, and broke off again. The aroma of alcohol on the air caught his sense, and his mind stopped at the perception that Tavender was more or less drunk. He strove to spur it forward, to compel it to encompass the meanings of this new crisis, but almost in vain.

"Thought I 'd look you up," said the old man, buoyantly. "Nobody in London I 'd rather see than you. How are you, anyway?"

"What did you come over for? When did you get here?" Thorpe put the questions automatically. His self-control was returning to him; his capable brain pushed forward now under something like disciplined direction.

"Why I guess I owe it all to you," replied Tavender. Traces of the old Quaker effect which had been so characteristic of him still hung about his garb and mien, but there shone a new assurance on his benignant, rubicund face. Prosperity had visibly liberalized and enheartened him. He shook Thorpe's hand again. "Yes, sir—it must have been all through you!" he repeated. "I got my cable three weeks ago—'Hasten to London, urgent business, expenses and liberal fee guaranteed, Rubber Consols'—that 's what the cable said, that is, the first

one—and of course you 're the man that introduced me to those rubber people. And so don't you see I owe it all to you ? "

His insistence upon his obligation was suddenly almost tearful. Thorpe thought hard as he replied : " Oh—that 's all right. I 'm very glad indeed to have helped you along. And so you came over for the Rubber Consols people, eh ? Well—that 's good. Seen 'em yet ? You have n't told me when you landed."

" Came up from Southampton this morning. My brother-in-law was down there to meet me. We came up to London together."

" Your brother-in-law," observed Thorpe, meditatively. Some shadowy, remote impression of having forgotten something troubled his mind for an instant. " Is your brother-in-law in the rubber business ? "

"Extraor'nary thing," explained Tavender, beamingly, " he don't know no more about the whole affair than the man 'n the moon. I asked him today—but he could n't tell me anything about the business—what it was I 'd been sent for, or anything."

" But he—he knew you 'd been sent for," Thorpe commented upon brief reflection.

" Why, he sent the second cable himself——"

" What second cable ? "

" Why it was the next day,—or maybe it was sent that same night, and not delivered till morning,—I got another cable, this time from my brother-in-law, telling me to cable him what ship I sailed on and when. So of course he knew all about it—but now he says he don't. He 's a curious sort of fellow, anyway."

" But how is he mixed up in it ? " demanded Thorpe, impatiently.

" Well, as nearly as I can figure it out, he works for one

of the men that 's at the head of this rubber company. It appears that he happened to show this man—he 's a man of title, by the way—a letter I wrote to him last spring, when I got back to Mexico—and so in that way this man, when he wanted me to come over, just told Gafferson to cable to me."

"Gafferson," Thorpe repeated, very slowly, and with almost an effect of listlessness. He was conscious of no surprise ; it was as if he had divined all along the sinister shadows of Lord Plowden and Lord Plowden's gardener, lurking in the obscurity behind this egregious old ass of a Tavender.

"He 's a tremendous horticultural sharp," said the other. "Probably you 've heard tell of him. He 's taken medals for new flowers and things till you can't rest. He 's over at—what do you call it?—the Royal Aquarium, now, to see the Dahlia Show. I went over there with him, but it did n't seem to be my kind of a show, and so I left him there, and I 'm to look in again for him at 5.30. I 'm going down to his place in the country with him tonight, to meet his boss—the nobleman I spoke of."

"That 's nice," Thorpe commented, slowly. "I envy anybody who can get into the country these days. But how did you know I was here?"

"The woman in the book-store told me—I went there the first thing. You might be sure I 'd look you up. Nobody was ever a better friend than you 've been to me, Thorpe. And do you know what I want you to do? I want you to come right bang out, now, and have a drink with me."

"I was thinking of something of the sort myself," the big man replied. "I 'll get my hat, and be with you in a minute."

In the next room he relinquished his countenance to a frown of fierce perplexity. More than a minute passed in this scowling preoccupation. Then his face lightened with the relief of an idea, and he stepped confidently back into the parlour.

"Come along," he said, jovially. "We 'll have a drink downstairs, and then we 'll drive up to Hanover Square and see if we can't find a friend of mine at his club."

In the office below he stopped long enough to secure a considerable roll of bank-notes in exchange for a cheque. A little later, a hansom deposited the couple at the door of the Asian Club, and Thorpe, in the outer hallway of this institution, clicked his teeth in satisfaction at the news that General Kervick was on the premises.

The General, having been found by a boy and brought down, extended to his guests a hospitality which was none the less urbane for the evidences of surprise with which it was seasoned. He concealed so indifferently his inability to account for Tavender, that the anxious Thorpe grew annoyed with him, but happily Tavender's perceptions were less subtle. He gazed about him in his dim-eyed way with childlike interest, and babbled cheerfully over his liquor. He had not been inside a London club before, and his glimpse of the reading-room, where, isolated, purple-faced, retired old Empire-makers sat snorting in the silence, their gouty feet propped up on foot-rests, their white brows scowling over the pages of French novels, particularly impressed him. It was a new and halcyon vision of the way to spend one's declining years. And the big smoking-room—where the leather cushions were so low and so soft, and the connection between the bells and the waiters was so efficient—that was even better.

Thorpe presently made an excuse for taking Kervick

apart. "I brought this old jackass here for a purpose," he said in low, gravely mandatory tones. "He thinks he 's got an appointment at 5.30 this afternoon—but he 's wrong. He has n't. He 's not going to have any appointment at all—for a long time yet. I want you to get him drunk, there where he sits, and then take him away with you, and get him drunker still, and then take a train with him somewhere—any station but Charing Cross or that line—and I don't care where you land with him—Scotland or Ireland or France—whatever you like. Here 's some money for you—and you can write to me for more. I don't care what you say to him—make up any yarn you like—only keep him pacified, and keep him away from London, and don't let a living soul talk to him—till I give you the word. You 'll let me know where you are. I 'll get away now—and mind, General, a good deal depends on the way you please me in this thing."

The soldier's richly-florid face and intent, bulging blue eyes expressed vivid comprehension. He nodded with eloquence as he slipped the notes into his trousers pocket. "Absolutely," he murmured with martial brevity, from under his white, tight moustache.

With only a vague word or two of meaningless explanation to Tavender, Thorpe took his departure, and walked back to the hotel. From what he had learned and surmised, it was not difficult to put the pieces of the puzzle together. This ridiculous old fool, he remembered now, had reproached himself, when he was in England before, for his uncivil neglect of his brother-in-law. By some absurd chance, this damned brother-in-law happened to be Gafferson. It was clear enough that, when he returned to Mexico, Tavender had written to Gafferson, explaining the unexpected pressure of business which had

taken up all his time in England. Probably he had been idiot enough to relate what he of course regarded as the most wonderful piece of good news—how the worthless concession he had been deluded into buying had been bought back from him. As likely as not he had even identified the concession, and given Thorpe's name as that of the man who had first impoverished and then mysteriously enriched him. At all events, he had clearly mentioned that he had a commission to report upon the Rubber Consols property, and had said enough else to create the impression that there were criminal secrets connected with its sale to the London Company. The rest was easy. Gafferson, knowing Lord Plowden's relation to the Company, had shown him Tavender's letter. Lord Plowden, meditating upon it, had seen a way to be nasty —and had vindictively plunged into it. He had brought Tavender from Mexico to London, to use him as a weapon. All this was as obvious as the nose on one's face.

But a weapon for what? Thorpe, as this question put itself in his mind, halted before a shop-window full of soft-hued silk fabrics, to muse upon an answer. The delicate tints and surfaces of what was before his eyes seemed somehow to connect themselves with the subject. Plowden himself was delicately-tinted and refined of texture. Vindictiveness was too plain and coarse an emotion to sway such a complicated and polished organism. He reasoned it out, as he stood with lack-lustre gaze before the plate-glass front, aloof among a throng of eager and talkative women who pressed around him—that Plowden would not have spent his money on a mere impulse of mischief-making. He would be counting upon something more tangible than revenge—something that could be counted and weighed and converted into a bank-balance. He smiled when he reached this conclusion—greatly sur-

prising and confusing a matronly lady into whose correct face he chanced to be looking at the instant—and turning slowly, continued his walk.

At the office of the hotel, he much regretted not having driven instead, for he learned that Semple had twice telephoned from the City for him. It was late in the afternoon—he noted with satisfaction that the clock showed it to be already past the hour of the Tavender-Gafferson appointment,—but he had Semple's office called up, upon the chance that someone might be there. The clerk had not consumed more than ten minutes in the preliminaries of finding out that no one was there—Thorpe meanwhile passing savage comments to the other clerks about the British official conception of the telephone as an instrument of discipline and humiliation—when Semple himself appeared in the doorway.

The Broker gave an exclamation of relief at seeing Thorpe, and then, apparently indifferent to the display of excitement he was exhibiting, drew him aside.

"Come somewhere where we can talk," he whispered nervously.

Thorpe had never seen the little Scotchman in such a flurry. "We 'll go up to my rooms," he said, and led the way to the lift.

Upstairs, Semple bolted the door of the sitting-room behind them, and satisfied himself that there was no one in the adjoining bedroom. Then, unburdening himself with another sigh, he tossed aside his hat, and looked keenly up at the big man. "There 's the devil to pay," he said briefly.

Thorpe had a fleeting pride in the lethargic, composed front he was able to present. "All right," he said with forced placidity. "If he 's got to be paid, we 'll pay him." He continued to smile a little.

"It 's nah joke," the other hastened to warn him. "I have it from two different quarters. An application has been made to the Stock Exchange Committee, this afternoon, to intervene and stop our business, on the ground of fraud. It comes verra straight to me."

Thorpe regarded his Broker contemplatively. The news fitted with precision into what he had previously known; it was rendered altogether harmless by the precautions he had already taken. "Well, keep your hair on," he said, quietly. "If there were fifty applications, they would n't matter the worth of that soda-water cork. Won't you have a drink?"

Semple, upon reflection, said he would. The unmoved equipoise of the big man visibly reassured him. He sipped at his bubbling tumbler and smacked his thin lips. "Man, I 've had an awful fright," he said at last, in the tone of one whose ease of mind is returning.

"I gave you credit for more nerve," observed the other, eyeing him in not unkindly fashion over his glass. "You 've been so plumb full of sand all the while—I did n't think you 'd weaken now. Why, we 're within two days of home, now—and for you to get rattled at this late hour—you ought to be ashamed of yourself."

The Scotchman looked into the bottom of his glass, as he turned it thoughtfully round. "I 'm relieved to see the way you take it," he said, after a pause. With increased hesitation he went dryly on: "I 've never enquired minutely into the circumstances of the flotation. It has not seemed to be my business to do so, and upon advice I may say that the Committee would not hold that such was my business. My position is quite clear, upon that point."

"Oh, perfectly," Thorpe assented. "It could n't possibly be any of your business—either then, or now." He

gave a significant touch of emphasis to these last two words.

"Precisely," said Semple, with a glance of swift comprehension. "You must not think I am asking any intrusive questions. If you tell me that—that there is no ground for uneasiness—I am verra pleased indeed to accept the assurance. That is ample information for my purposes."

"You can take it from me," Thorpe told him. He picked up a red book from a side table, and turned over its pages with his thick thumb. "This is what Rule 59 says," he went on: "'*No application which has for its object to annul any bargain in the Stock Exchange shall be entertained by the Committee, unless upon a specific allegation of fraud or wilful misrepresentation.*' Shall be entertained, d' ye see? They can't even consider anything of the sort, because it says 'specific,' and I tell you plainly that anything 'specific' is entirely out of the question."

The Broker lifted his sandy brows in momentary apprehension. "If it turns upon the precise definition of a word," he remarked, doubtingly.

"Ah, yes,—but it does n't," Thorpe reassured him. "See here—I 'll tell you something. You 're not asking any questions. That 's as it should be. And I 'm not forcing information upon you which you don't need in your business. That 's as it should be, too. But in between these two, there 's a certain margin of facts that there 's no harm in your knowing. A scheme to blackmail me is on foot. It 's rather a fool-scheme, if you ask me, but it might have been a nuisance if it had been sprung on us unawares. It happened, however, that I twigged this scheme about two hours ago. It was the damnedest bit of luck you ever heard of——"

"*You* don't have luck," put in Semple, appreciatively.

"Other men have luck. You have something else—I don't give it a name."

Thorpe smiled upon him, and went on. "I twigged it, anyway. I went out, and I drove the biggest kind of spike through that fool-scheme—plumb through its heart. Tomorrow a certain man will come to me—oh, I could almost tell you the kind of neck-tie he 'll wear—and he 'll put up his bluff to me, and I 'll hear him out—and then—then I 'll let the floor drop out from under him."

"Aye!" said Semple, with relish.

"Stay and dine with me tonight," Thorpe impulsively suggested, "and we 'll go to some Music Hall afterward. There 's a knock-about pantomime outfit at the Canterbury—Martinetti I think the name is—that 's damned good. You get plenty of laugh, and no tiresome blab to listen to. The older I get, the more I think of people that keep their mouths shut."

"Aye," observed Semple again.

CHAPTER XX

IN the Board Room, next day, Thorpe awaited the coming of Lord Plowden with the serene confidence of a prophet who not only knows that he is inspired, but has had an illicit glimpse into the workings of the machinery of events.

He sat motionless at his desk, like a big spider for whom time has no meaning. Before him lay two newspapers, folded so as to expose paragraphs heavily indicated by blue pencil-marks. They were not financial journals, and for that reason it was improbable that he would have seen these paragraphs, if the Secretary of the Company had not marked them, and brought them to him. That official had been vastly more fluttered by them than he found it possible to be. In slightly-varying language, these two items embedded in so-called money articles reported the rumour that a charge of fraud had arisen in connection with the Rubber Consols corner, and that sensational disclosures were believed to be impending.

Thorpe looked with a dulled, abstracted eye at these papers, lying on the desk, and especially at the blue pencil-lines upon them, as he pondered many things. Their statement, thus scattered broadcast to the public, seemed at once to introduce a new element into the situation, and to leave it unchanged. That influence of some sort had been exerted to get this story into these papers, it did not occur to him for an instant to doubt. To his view, all things that were put into papers were put there

for a purpose—it would express his notion more clearly, perhaps, to say for a price. Of the methods of Fleet Street, he was profoundly ignorant, but his impressions of them were all cynical. Upon reflection, however, it seemed unlikely to him that Lord Plowden had secured the insertion of these rumours. So far as Thorpe could fathom that nobleman's game, its aims would not be served by premature publicity of this kind.

Gradually, the outlines of a more probable combination took shape in his thoughts. There were left in the grip of the "corner" now only two victims,—Rostocker and Aronson. They owed this invidious differentiation to a number of causes: they had been the chief sellers of stock, being between them responsible for the delivery of 8,500 Rubber Consols shares, which they could not get; they were men of larger fortune than the other "shorts," and therefore could with safety be squeezed longest; what was fortunate for him under the circumstances, they were the two men against whom Thorpe's personal grudge seemed able to maintain itself most easily.

For these reasons, they had already been mulcted in differences to the extent of, in round numbers, £165,000. On the morrow, the twelfth of September, it was Thorpe's plan to allow them to buy in the shares they needed, at £22 or £23 per share—which would take from them nearly £200,000 more. He had satisfied himself that they could, and would if necessary, pay this enormous ransom for their final escape from the "corner." Partly because it was not so certain that they could pay more, partly because he was satiated with spoils and tired of the strain of the business, he had decided to permit this escape.

He realized now, however, that they on their side had planned to escape without paying any final ransom at all.

That was clearly the meaning of these paragraphs, and of the representations which had yesterday been made to the Stock Exchange Committee. He had additional knowledge today of the character of these representations. Nothing definite had been alleged, but some of the members of the Committee had been informally notified, so Semple had this morning learned, that a specific charge of fraud, supported by unanswerable proof, was to be brought against the Rubber Consols management on the morrow. Thorpe reasoned out now, step by step, what that meant. Lord Plowden had sought out Rostocker and Aronson, and had told them that he had it in his power ignominiously to break the "corner." He could hardly have told them the exact nature of his power, because until he should have seen Tavender he did not himself know what it was. But he had given them to understand that he could prove fraud, and they, scenting in this the chance of saving £200,000, and seeing that time was so terribly short, had hastened to the Committeemen with this vague declaration that, on the morrow, they could prove—they did not precisely know what. Yes—plainly enough—that was what had happened. And it would be these two Jew "wreckers," eager to invest their speculative notification to the Committee with as much of an air of formality as possible, who had caused the allusions to it to be published in these papers.

Thorpe's lustreless eye suddenly twinkled with mirth as he reached this conclusion; his heavy face brightened into a grin of delight. A vision of Lord Plowden's absurd predicament rose vividly before him, and he chuckled aloud at it.

It seemed only the most natural thing in the world that, at this instant, a clerk should open the door and nod with meaning to the master. The visitor whom he had

warned the people in the outer office he expected, had arrived. Thorpe was still laughing to himself when Lord Plowden entered.

"Hallo! How d' ye do!" he called out to him from where he sat at his desk.

The hilarity of the manner into which he had been betrayed, upon the instant surprised and rather confused him. He had not been altogether clear as to how he should receive Plowden, but certainly a warm joviality had not occurred to him as appropriate.

The nobleman was even more taken aback. He stared momentarily at the big man's beaming mask, and then, with nervous awkwardness, executed a series of changes in his own facial expression and demeanour. He flushed red, opened his lips to say "Ah!" and then twisted them into a doubting and seemingly painful smile. He looked with very bright-eyed intentness at Thorpe, as he advanced, and somewhat spasmodically put out his hand.

It occurred to Thorpe not to see this hand. "How are you!" he repeated in a more mechanical voice, and withdrew his smile.

Lord Plowden fidgeted on his feet for a brief, embarrassed interval before the desk, and then dropped into a chair at its side. With a deliberate effort at nonchalance, he crossed his legs, and caressed the ankle on his knee with a careless hand. "Anything new?" he asked.

Thorpe lolled back in his arm-chair. "I 'm going to be able to get away in a few days' time," he said, indifferently. "I expect to finally wind up the business on the Stock Exchange tomorrow."

"Ah—yes," commented Plowden, vacantly. He seemed to be searching after thoughts which had wandered astray. "Yes—of course."

"Yes—of course," Thorpe said after him, with a latent touch of significance.

The other looked up quickly, then glanced away again. "It 's all going as you expected, is it?" he asked.

"Better than I expected," Thorpe told him, energetically. "Much better than anybody expected."

"Hah!" said Plowden. After a moment's reflection he went on hesitatingly: "I did n't know. I saw something in one of the papers this morning,—one of the money articles,—which spoke as if there were some doubt about the result. That 's why I called."

"Well—it 's damned good of you to come round, and show such a friendly interest." Thorpe's voice seemed candid enough, but there was an enigmatic something in his glance which aroused the other's distrust.

"I 'm afraid you don't take very much stock in the 'friendly interest,'" he said, with a constrained little laugh.

"I 'm not taking stock in anything new just now," replied Thorpe, lending himself lazily to the other's metaphor. "I 'm loaded up to the gunnels already."

A minute of rather oppressive silence ensued. Then Plowden ventured upon an opening. "All the same, it was with an idea of,—perhaps being of use to you,—that I came here," he affirmed.

"In what way?" Thorpe put the query almost listlessly.

Lord Plowden turned his hands and let his dark eyes sparkle in a gesture of amiable uncertainty. "That depended upon what was needed. I got the impression that you were in trouble—the paper spoke as if there were no doubt of it—and I imagined that quite probably you would be glad to talk with me about it."

"Quite right," said Thorpe. "So I should."

This comprehensive assurance seemed not, however, to facilitate conversation. The nobleman looked at the pattern of the sock on the ankle he was nursing, and knitted his brows in perplexity. "What if the Committee of the Stock Exchange decide to interfere?" he asked at last.

"Oh, that would knock me sky-high," Thorpe admitted.

"Approximately, how much may one take 'sky-high' to mean?"

Thorpe appeared to calculate. "Almost anything up to a quarter of a million," he answered.

"Hah!" said Lord Plowden again. "Well—I understand—I 'm given to understand—that very likely that is what the Committee will decide."

"Does it say that in the papers?" asked Thorpe. He essayed an effect of concern. "Where did you see that?"

"I did n't see it," the other explained. "It—it came to me."

"God!" said Thorpe. "That 'll be awful! But are you really in earnest? Is that what you hear? And does it come at all straight?"

Lord Plowden nodded portentously. "Absolutely straight," he said, with gravity.

Thorpe, after a momentary stare of what looked like bewilderment, was seen to clutch at a straw. "But what was it you were saying?" he demanded, with eagerness. "You talked about help—a minute ago. Did you mean it? Have you got a plan? Is there something that you can do?"

Plowden weighed his words. "It would be necessary to have a very complete understanding," he remarked.

"Whatever you like," exclaimed the other.

"Pardon me—it would have to be a good deal more

definite than that," Plowden declared. "A 'burnt child' —you know."

The big man tapped musingly with his finger-nails on the desk. "We won't quarrel about that," he said. "But what I 'd like to know first,—you need n't give anything away that you don't want to,—but what 's your plan? You say that they 've got me in a hole, and that you can get me out."

"In effect—yes."

"But how do you know that I can't get myself out? What do you know about the whole thing anyway? Supposing I tell you that I laugh at it—that there 's no more ground for raising the suspicion of fraud than there is for—for suspecting that you 've got wings and can fly."

"I—I don't think you 'll tell me that," said Plowden, placidly.

"Well then, supposing I don't tell you that," the other resumed, argumentatively. "Supposing I say instead that it can't be proved. If the Committee does n't have proof *now*,—within twenty-one or twenty-two hours,—they can't do anything at all. Tomorrow is settling day. All along, I 've said I would wind up the thing tomorrow. The market-price has been made for me by the jobbers yesterday and today. I 'm all ready to end the whole business tomorrow—close it all out. And after that 's done, what do I care about the Stock Exchange Committee? They can investigate and be damned! What could they do to me?"

"I think a man can always be arrested and indicted, and sent to penal servitude," said Lord Plowden, with a certain solemnity of tone. "There are even well-known instances of extradition."

Thorpe buried his chin deep in his collar, and regarded his companion with a fixed gaze, in which the latter de-

tected signs of trepidation. "But about the Committee—and tomorrow," he said slowly. "What do you say about that? How can they act in that lightning fashion? And even if proofs could be got, how do you suppose they are to be got on the drop of the hat, at a minute's notice?"

"The case is of sufficient importance to warrant a special meeting tomorrow morning," the other rejoined. "One hour's notice, posted in the House, is sufficient, I believe. Any three members of the Committee can call such a meeting, and I understand that seven make a quorum. You will see that a meeting could be held at noon tomorrow, and within half an hour could make you a ruined man."

"I don't know—would you call it quite ruined?" commented Thorpe. "I should still have a few sovereigns to go on with."

"A criminal prosecution would be practically inevitable—after such a disclosure," Plowden reminded him, with augmented severity of tone.

"Don't mix the two things up," the other urged. There seemed to the listener to be supplication in the voice. "It 's the action of the Committee that you said you could influence. That 's what we were talking about. You say there will be a special meeting at noon tomorrow——"

"I said there could be one," Plowden corrected him.

"All right. There *can* be one. And do you say that there can be proof,—proof against me of fraud,—produced at that meeting?"

"Yes—I say that," the nobleman affirmed, quietly.

"And further still—do you say that it rests with you whether that proof shall be produced or not?"

Lord Plowden looked into the impassive, deep-eyed gaze which covered him, and looked away from it again. "I

have n't put it in just that form," he said, hesitatingly. "But in essentials—yes, that may be taken as true."

"And what is your figure? How much do you want for holding this proof of yours back, and letting me finish scooping the money of your Hebrew friends Aronson and Rostocker?"

The peer raised his head, and shot a keenly enquiring glance at the other. "Are they my friends?" he asked, with challenging insolence.

"I 'm bound to assume that you have been dealing with them, just as you are dealing with me." Thorpe explained his meaning dispassionately, as if the transaction were entirely commonplace. "You tell them that you 're in a position to produce proof against me, and ask them what they 'll give for it. Then naturally enough you come to me, and ask what I 'll be willing to pay to have the proof suppressed. I quite understand that I must bid against these men—and of course I take it for granted that, since you know their figure, you 've arranged in your mind what mine is to be. I quite understand, too, that I am to pay more than they have offered. That is on account of 'friendly interest.'"

"Since you allude to it," Lord Plowden observed, with a certain calm loftiness of tone, "there is no harm in saying that you *will* pay something on that old score. Once you thrust the promise of something like a hundred thousand pounds positively upon me. You insisted on my believing it, and I did so, like a fool. I came to you to redeem the promise, and you laughed in my face. Very well. It is my turn now. I hold the whip-hand, and I should be an ass not to remember things. I shall want that entire one hundred thousand pounds from you, and fifty thousand added to it 'on account of the friendly interest,' as you so intelligently expressed it."

"WITHOUT HESITATION, WROTE SEVERAL LINES RAPIDLY."—*Page 209.*

Thorpe's chin burrowed still deeper upon his breast. "It 's an outrage," he said with feeling. Then he added, in tones of dejected resignation: "When will you want it?"

"At the moment when the payments of Rostocker and Aronson are made to you, or to your bankers or agents," Lord Plowden replied, with prepared facility. He had evidently given much thought to this part of the proceedings. "And of course I shall expect you to draw up now an agreement to that effect. I happen to have a stamped paper with me this time. And if you don't mind, we will have it properly witnessed—this time."

Thorpe looked at him with a disconcertingly leaden stare, the while he thought over what had been proposed. "That 's right enough," he announced at last, "but I shall expect you to do some writing too. Since we 're dealing on this basis, there must be no doubt about the guarantee that you will perform your part of the contract."

"The performance itself, since payment is conditional upon it—" began Plowden, but the other interrupted him.

"No, I want something better than that. Here—give me your stamped paper." He took the bluish sheet, and, without hesitation, wrote several lines rapidly. "Here—this is my promise," he said, "to pay you £150,000, upon your satisfactory performance of a certain undertaking to be separately nominated in a document called 'A,' which we will jointly draw up and agree to and sign, and deposit wherever you like—for safe keeping. Now, if you 'll sit here, and write out for me a similar thing—that in consideration of my promise of £150,000, you covenant to perform the undertaking to be nominated in the document 'A'—and so on."

Lord Plowden treated as a matter of course the ready

and business-like suggestion of the other. Taking his place at the desk in turn, he wrote out what had been suggested. Thorpe touched a bell, and the clerk who came in perfunctorily attested the signatures upon both papers. Each principal folded and pocketed the pledge of the other.

"Now," said Thorpe, when he had seated himself again at the desk, "we are all right so far as protection against each other goes. If you don't mind, I will draw up a suggestion of what the separate document 'A' should set forth. If you don't like it, you can write one."

He took more time to this task, frowning laboriously over the fresh sheet of foolscap, and screening from observation with his hand what he was writing. Finally, the task seemed finished to his mind. He took up the paper, glanced through it once more, and handed it in silence to the other.

In silence also, and with an expression of arrested attention, Lord Plowden read these lines:

"*The undertaking referred to in the two documents of even date, signed respectively by Lord Plowden and Stormont Thorpe, is to the effect that at some hour between eleven* A.M. *and three* P.M. *of September 12th, instant, Lord Plowden shall produce before a special meeting of the Committee of the Stock Exchange, the person of one Jerome P. Tavender, to explain to said Committee his share in the blackmailing scheme of which Lord Plowden, over his own signature, has furnished documentary evidence.*"

The nobleman continued to look down at the paper, after the power to hold it without shaking had left his hand. There came into his face, mingling with and vitiating its rich natural hues of health, a kind of grey shadow. It was as if clay was revealing itself beneath faded paint. He did not lift his eyes.

Thorpe had been prepared to hail this consummation of his trick with boisterous and scornful mirth. Even while the victim was deciphering the fatal paper, he had restrained with impatience the desire to burst out into bitter laughter. But now there was something in the aspect of Plowden's collapse which seemed to forbid triumphant derision. He was taking his blow so like a gentleman,—ashen-pale and quivering, but clinging to a high-bred dignity of silence,—that the impulse to exhibit equally good manners possessed Thorpe upon the instant.

"Well—you see how little business you 've got, setting yourself to buck against a grown-up man."

He offered the observation in the tone of the schoolteacher, affectedly philosophical but secretly jubilant, who harangues a defeated and humiliated urchin upon his folly.

"Oh, chuck it!" growled Lord Plowden, staring still at the calamitous paper.

Thorpe accepted in good part the intimation that silence was after all most decorous. He put his feet up on the corner of the desk, and tipping back his chair, surveyed the discomfited Viscount impassively. He forbore even to smile.

"So this swine of a Tavender came straight to you!" Lord Plowden had found words at last. As he spoke, he lifted his face, and made a show of looking the other in the eye.

"Oh, there are a hundred things in your own game, even, that you have n't an inkling of," Thorpe told him, lightly. "I 've been watching every move you 've made, seeing further ahead in your own game than you did. Why, it was too easy! It was like playing draughts with a girl. I knew you would come today, for example. I told the people out there that I expected you."

"Yes-s," said the other, with rueful bewilderment. "You seem to have been rather on the spot—I confess."

"On the spot? All over the place!" Thorpe lifted himself slightly in his chair, and put more animation into his voice.

"It 's the mistake you people make!" he declared oracularly. "You think that a man can come into the City without a penny, and form great combinations and carry through a great scheme, and wage a fight with the smartest set of scoundrels on the London Stock Exchange and beat 'em, and make for himself a big fortune—and still be a fool! You imagine that a man like that can be played with, and hoodwinked by amateurs like yourself. It 's too ridiculous!"

The perception that apparently Thorpe bore little or no malice had begun to spread through Plowden's consciousness. It was almost more surprising to him than the revelation of his failure had been. He accustomed himself to the thought gradually, and as he did so the courage crept back into his glance. He breathed more easily.

"You are right!" he admitted. It cost him nothing to give a maximum of fervid conviction to the tone of his words. The big brute's pride in his own brains and power was still his weakest point. "You are right! I did play the fool. And it was all the more stupid, because I was the first man in London to recognize the immense forces in you. I said to you at the very outset, 'You are going to go far. You are going to be a great man.' You remember that, don't you?"

Thorpe nodded. "Yes—I remember it."

The nobleman, upon reflection, drew a little silver box from his pocket, and extracted a match. "Do you mind?" he asked, and scarcely waiting for a token of re-

ply, struck a flame upon the sole of his shoe, and applied it to the sheet of foolscap he still held in his hand. The two men watched it curl and blacken after it had been tossed in the grate, without a word.

This incident had the effect of recalling to Thorpe the essentials of the situation. He had allowed the talk to drift to a point where it became almost affable. He sat upright with a sudden determination, and put his feet firmly on the floor, and knitted his brows in austerity.

"It was not only a dirty trick that you tried to play me," he said, in an altered, harsh tone, "but it was a fool-trick. That drunken old bum of a Tavender writes some lunatic nonsense or other to Gafferson, and he 's a worse idiot even than Tavender is, and on the strength of what one of these clowns thinks he surmises the other clown means, you go and spend your money,—money I gave you, by the way,—in bringing Tavender over here. You do this on the double chance, we 'll say, of using him against me for revenge and profit combined, or of peddling him to me for a still bigger profit. You see it 's all at my fingers' ends."

Lord Plowden nodded an unqualified assent.

"Well then—Tavender arrives. What do you do? Are you at the wharf to meet him? Have you said to yourself: 'I 've set out to fight one of the smartest and strongest men in England, and I 've got to keep every atom of wits about me, and strain every nerve to the utmost, and watch every point of the game as a tiger watches a snake'? Not a bit of it! You snooze in bed, and you send Gafferson—Gafferson!—the mud-head of the earth! to meet your Tavender, and loaf about with him in London, and bring him down by a slow train to your place in the evening. My God! You 've only got two

clear days left to do the whole thing in—and you don't even come up to town to get ready for them! You send Gafferson—and he goes off to see a flower-show—Mother of Moses! think of it! a *flower*-show!—and your Tavender and I are left to take a stroll together, and talk over old times and arrange about new times, and so on, to our hearts' content. Really, it 's too easy! You make me tired!"

The nobleman offered a wan, appealing shadow of a smile. "I confess to a certain degree of weariness myself," he said, humbly.

Thorpe looked at him in his old apathetic, leaden fashion for a little. "I may tell you that if you *had* got hold of Tavender," he decided to tell him, "he would n't have been of the faintest use to you. I know what it was that he wrote to Gafferson,—I could n't understand it when he first told me, but afterwards I saw through it,—and it was merely a maudlin misapprehension of his. He 'd got three or four things all mixed up together. You 've never met your friend Tavender, I believe? You 'd enjoy him at Hadlow House. He smells of rum a hundred yards off. What little brain he 's got left is soaked in it. The first time I was ever camping with him, I had to lick him for drinking the methylated spirits we were using with our tin stove. Oh, you 'd have liked him!"

"Evidently," said Lord Plowden, upon reflection, "it was all a most unfortunate and—ah—most deplorable mistake." With inspiration, he made bold to add: "The most amazing thing, though—to my mind—is that you don't seem—what shall I say?—particularly enraged with me about it."

"Yes—that surprises me, too," Thorpe meditatively admitted. "I was entitled to kill you—crush you to

jelly. Any other man I would. But you,—I don't know,—I do funny things with you."

"I wish you would give me a drink, now—as one of them," Plowden ventured to suggest, with uneasy pleasantry.

Thorpe smiled a little as he rose, and heavily moved across the room. He set out upon the big official table in the middle, that mockingly pretentious reminder of a Board which never met, a decanter and two glasses and some recumbent, round-bottomed bottles. He handed one of these last to Plowden, as the latter strolled toward the table.

"You know how to open these, don't you?" he said, languidly. "Somehow I never could manage it."

The nobleman submissively took the bottle, and picked with awkwardness at its wire and cork, and all at once achieved a premature and not over-successful explosion. He wiped his dripping cuff in silence, when the tumblers were supplied.

"Well,—here 's better luck to you next time," Thorpe said, lifting his glass. The audacious irony of his words filled Plowden with an instant purpose.

"What on earth did you round on me in that way for, Thorpe—when I was here last?" He put the question with bravery enough, but at sight of the other's unresponsive face grew suddenly timorous and explanatory. "No man was ever more astounded in the world than I was. To this day I 'm as unable to account for it as a babe unborn. What conceivable thing had I done to you?"

Thorpe slowly thought of something that had not occurred to him before, and seized upon it with a certain satisfaction.

"That day that you took me shooting," he said, with

the tone of one finally exposing a long-nursed grievance, "you stayed in bed for hours after you knew I was up and waiting for you—and when we went out, you had a servant to carry a chair for you, but I—by God !—I had to stand up."

"Heavens above!" ejaculated Plowden, in unfeigned amazement.

"These are little things—mere trifles," continued Thorpe, dogmatically, "but with men of my temper and make-up those are just the things that aggravate and rankle and hurt. Maybe it 's foolish, but that 's the kind of man I am. You ought to have had the intelligence to see that—and not let these stupid little things happen to annoy me. Why just think what you did. I was going to do God knows what for you—make your fortune and everything else,—and you did n't show consideration enough for me to get out of bed at a decent hour—much less see to it that I had a chair if you were going to have one."

"Upon my word, I can't tell how ashamed and sorry I am," Lord Plowden assured him, with fervent contrition in his voice.

"Well, those are the things to guard against," said Thorpe, approaching a dismissal of the subject. "People who show consideration for me ; people who take pains to do the little pleasant things for me, and see that I 'm not annoyed and worried by trifles—they 're the people that I, on my side, do the big things for. I can be the best friend in the world, but only to those who show that they care for me, and do what they know I 'll like. I don't want toadies about me, but I do want people who feel bound to me, and are as keen about me and my feelings and interests as they are about their own."

"It is delightfully feudal—all this," commented the

nobleman, smilingly addressing the remark to nobody in particular. Then he looked at Thorpe. "Let me be one of them—one of the people you speak of," he said, with directness.

Thorpe returned his look with the good-natured beginnings of a grin. "But what would you be good for?" he queried, in a bantering tone. "People I have about me have to be of some use. They require to have heads on their shoulders. Why—just think what you 've done. I don't mean so much about your letting Tavender slip through your fingers—although that was about the worst I ever heard of. But here in this room, at that desk there, you allowed me to bounce you into writing and signing a paper which you ought to have had your hand cut off rather than write, much less sign. You come here trying to work the most difficult and dangerous kind of a bluff,—knowing all the while that the witness you depended entirely upon had disappeared, you had n't the remotest idea where,—and you actually let me lead you into giving me your signature to your own declaration that you are blackmailing me! Thinking it all over—you know—I can't see that you would be of much help to me in the City."

Lord Plowden joined perforce in the laughter with which the big man enjoyed his own pleasantry. His mirth had some superficial signs of shamefacedness, but it was hopeful underneath. "The City!" he echoed, with meaning. "That 's the curse of it. What do I know about the City? What business have I in the City? As you said, I 'm the amateur. A strong man like you can make me seem any kind of a ridiculous fool he likes, with the turn of his hand. I see that right enough. But what am I to do? I have to make a shot at something. I 'm so rotten poor!"

Thorpe had retired again behind the barrier of dull-eyed abstraction. He seemed not to have heard this appealing explanation.

The other preserved silence in turn, and even made a pretence of looking at some pamphlets on the table, as a token of his boundless deference to the master's mood.

"I don't know. I 'll see," the big man muttered at last, doubtfully.

Lord Plowden felt warranted in taking an optimistic view of these vague words. "It 's awfully good of you" —he began, lamely, and then paused. "I wonder,"—he took up a new thought with a more solicitous tone,—"I wonder if you would mind returning to me that idiotic paper I signed."

Thorpe shook his head. "Not just now, at any rate," he said, still musingly. With his head bowed, he took a few restless steps.

"But you are going to—to help me!" the other remarked, with an air of confidence. He had taken up his hat, in response to the tacit warning of his companion's manner.

Thorpe looked at him curiously, and hesitated over his answer. It was a surprising and almost unaccountable conclusion for the interview to have reached. He was in some vague way ashamed of himself, but he was explicitly and contemptuously ashamed for Plowden, and the impulse to say so was strong within him. This handsome young gentleman of title ought not to be escaping with this restored buoyancy of mien, and this complacency of spirit. He had deserved to be punished with a heavy hand, and here he was blithely making certain of new benefits instead.

"I don't know—I 'll see," Thorpe moodily repeated—and there was no more to be said.

CHAPTER XXI

IN the noon hour of the following day was enacted the brief final scene in the drama of the "Rubber Consols corner."

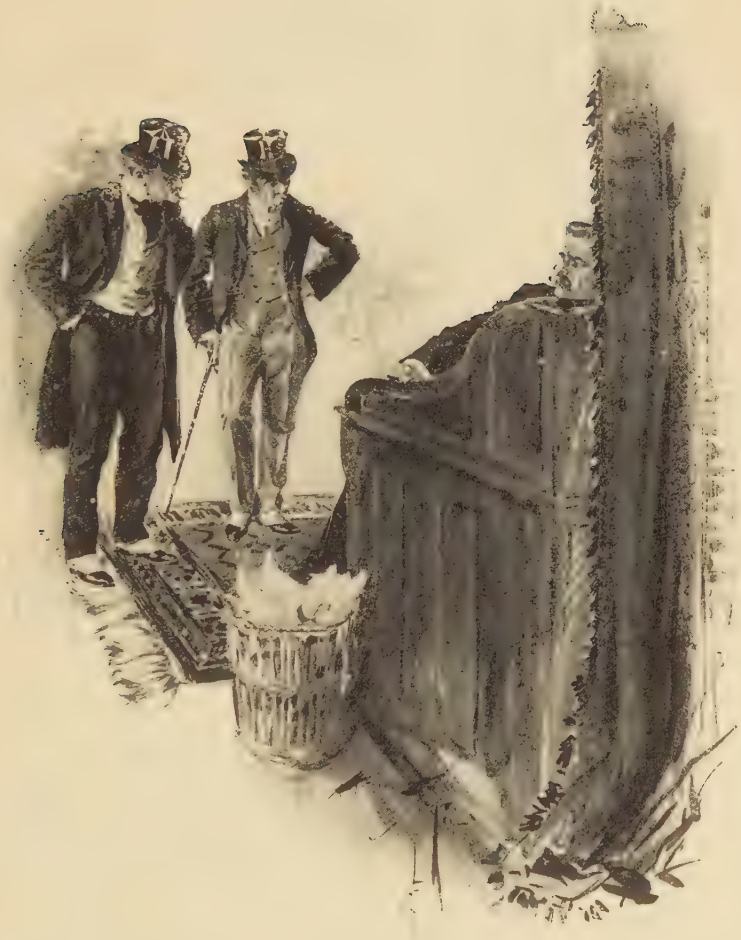
For long weeks, Mr. Stormont Thorpe had given much thought to this approaching climax of his great adventure —looking forward to it both as the crowning event of his life, and as the dawn of a new existence in some novel, enchanted world. It was to bring his triumph, and even more, his release. It was at once to crown him as a hero and chieftain among City men, and transfigure him into a being for whom all City things were an abomination. In his waking hours, the conflict between these aims did not specially force itself upon his attention : he mused upon, and spun fancies about, either one indifferently, and they seemed not at all irreconcilable. But his dreams were full of warfare,—wearily saturated with strife, and endless endeavour to do things which could not be done, and panic-stricken terrors before the shadow of shapeless calamities,—until he dreaded to go to sleep. Then he discovered that an extra two glasses of whiskey-and-water would solve that particular difficulty, and send him into prompt, leaden slumber—but the early mornings remained as torturing as ever. In the twilight he awoke oppressed and sick at heart with gloom—and then dozed at intervals through fantastic new ordeals of anguish and shame and fear, till it was decently possible to get up.

Then, indeed, the big cold sponge on his head and spine

scattered these foolish troubles like chaff, and restored to him his citizenship among the realities. He dressed with returning equanimity, and was almost cheerful by the time he thrust his razor into the hot water. Yet increasingly he was conscious of the wear and strain of it all, and increasingly the date, September twelfth, loomed before him with a portentous individuality of its own.

This day grew to mean so much more to him than had all the other days of the dead years together that he woke in the darkness of its opening hours, and did not get satisfactorily to sleep again. His vigil, however, was for the once free from grief. He drowsily awaited the morning in vague mental comfort ; he had recurring haphazard indolent glimpses of a protecting fact standing guard just outside the portals of consciousness—the fact that the great day was here. He rose early, breakfasted well, and walked by the Embankment to the City, where at ten he had a few words with Semple, and afterward caused himself to be denied to ordinary callers. He paced up and down the Board Room for the better part of the ensuing two hours, luxuriating in the general sense of satisfaction in the proximity of the climax, rather than pretending to himself that he was thinking out its details. He had provided in his plans of the day for a visit from Messrs. Rostocker and Aronson, which should constitute the dramatic finale of the "corner," and he looked forward to this meeting with a certain eagerness of expectation. Yet even here he thought broadly of the scene as a whole, and asked himself no questions about words and phrases. It seemed to be taken for granted in his mind that the scene itself would be theatrically impressive, even spectacular.

In the event, this long-awaited culmination proved to be disappointingly flat and commonplace. It was over



"WHEN THEY STOOD BRUSQUELY SILENT BEFORE HIM."—*Page 311.*

before Thorpe had said any considerable proportion of the things he saw afterward that he had intended to say. The two men came as he had expected they would—and they bought their way out of the tragic "corner" at precisely the price he had nominated in his mind. But hardly anything else went as he had dimly prefigured it.

Mr. Rostocker was a yellow-haired man, and Mr. Aronson was as dark as a Moor, and no physical resemblance of features or form suggested itself to the comparing eye, yet Thorpe even now, when they stood brusquely silent before him, with their carefully-brushed hats pulled down over their eyes, stuck to it in his own mind that it was hard to tell them apart. To the end, there was something impersonal in his feeling toward them. They, for their part, coldly abstained from exhibiting a sign of feeling about him, good, bad, or indifferent.

It was the man with the fair hair and little curly flaxen beard who spoke: "How do you do! I understand that we can buy eight thousand five hundred Rubber Consols from you at 'twenty-three.'"

"No—twenty-five," replied Thorpe.

The dark man spoke: "The jobbers' price is twenty-three."

"To carry over—yes," Thorpe answered. "But to buy it is twenty-five."

The two sons of the race which invented mental arithmetic exchanged an alert glance, and looked at the floor for an engrossed instant.

"I don't mind telling you," Thorpe interposed upon their silence, "I put on that extra two pounds because you got up that story about applying to the Stock Exchange Committee on a charge of fraud."

"We did n't get up any story," said Rostocker, curtly.

"You tried to plant it on us," Aronson declared.

"One of your own Directors put it about. I thought I was a fake at the time."

This view of the episode took Thorpe by surprise. As it seemed, in passing, to involve a compliment to his own strategic powers, he accepted it without comment. "Well —it is twenty-five, anyway," he told them, with firmness.

"Twenty-four," suggested Aronson, after another momentary pause.

"Not a shilling less than twenty-five," Thorpe insisted, with quiet doggedness.

"We can always pay our creditors and let you whistle," Rostocker reminded him, laconically.

"You can do anything you like," was the reply, "except buy Rubber Consols under twenty-five. It does n't matter a fig to me whether you go bankrupt or not. It would suit me as well to have you two 'hammered' as to take your money." Upon the spur of a sudden thought he drew out his watch. "In just two minutes' time to a tick, the price will be thirty."

"Let 's be 'hammered' then!" said Aronson to his companion, with simulated impulsiveness.

Rostocker was the older and stronger man, and when at last he spoke it was with the decision of one in authority. "It is your game," he said, with grave imperturbability. "Eight thousand five hundred at twenty-five. Will you deliver at the Credit Lyonnais in half an hour?"

Thorpe nodded, impassively. Then a roving idea of genial impertinence brought a gleam to his eye. "If you should happen to want more Rubber Consols at any time," he said, with a tentative chuckle, "I could probably let you have them at a reduced price."

The two received the pleasantry without a smile, but to Thorpe's astonishment one of them seemed to discern something in it beside banter. It was Rostocker who

said: "Perhaps we may make a deal with you," and apparently meant it.

They went out at this, ignoring ceremony upon their exit as stolidly as they had done upon their entrance, and a moment later Thorpe called in the Secretary, and despatched a messenger to bring Semple from Capel Court. The formalities of this final transfer of shares had been dictated to the former, and he had gone off on the business, before the Broker arrived.

Thorpe stood waiting near the door, and held out his hand with a dramatically significant gesture when the little Scotchman entered. "Put her there!" he exclaimed heartily, with an exuberant reversion to the slang of remote transatlantic bonhomie.

"Yeh 've done it, then!" said Semple, his sharp face softening with pleasure at the news. "Yeh 've pulled it off at twenty-three!"

The other's big countenance yielded itself to a boyish grin. "Twenty-*five!*" he said, and laughed aloud. "After you left this morning, it kind o' occurred to me that I 'd raise it a couple of pounds. I found I was madder about those pieces in the newspapers than I thought I was, and so I took an extra seventeen thousand pounds on that account."

"God above!" Semple ejaculated, with a satisfaction through which signs of an earlier fright were visible. "It was touch-and-go if you did n't lose it all by doing that! You risked everything, man!"

Thorpe ponderously shrugged his shoulders. "Well—I did it, anyhow, and it came off," was his comment. Then, straightening himself, he drew a long, long breath, and beamed down at the little man. "Think of it! God! It 's actually all over! And *now* perhaps we won't have a drink! Hell! Let 's send out for some champagne!"

His finger was hovering over the bell, when the Broker's dissuading voice arrested it. "No, no!" Semple urged. "I would n't touch it. It 's no fit drink for the daytime —and it 's a scandal in an office. Your clerks will aye blab it about hither and you, and nothing harms a man's reputation more in the City."

"Oh, to hell with the City!" cried Thorpe, joyously. "I 'm never going to set foot in it again. Think of that! I mean it!"

None the less, he abandoned the idea of sending out for wine, and contented himself with the resources of the cabinet instead. After some friendly pressure, Semple consented to join him in a brandy-and-soda, though he continued to protest between sips that at such an hour it was an indecent practice.

"It 's the ruin of many a strong man," he moralized, looking rather pointedly at Thorpe over his glass. "It 's the principal danger that besets the verra successful man. He 's too busily occupied to take exercise, and he 's too anxious and worried to get his proper sleep—but he can always drink! In one sense, I 'm not sorry to think that you 're leaving the City."

"Oh, it never hurts me," Thorpe said, indifferently accepting the direction of the homily. "I 'm as strong as an ox. But all the same, I shall be better in every way for getting out of this hole. Thank God, I can get off to Scotland tomorrow. But I say, Semple, what 's the matter with your visiting me at my place there? I 'll give you the greatest shooting and fishing you ever heard of."

The Broker was thinking of something else. "What is to be the precise position of the Company, in the immediate future?" he asked.

"Company? What Company?"

Semple smiled grimly. "Have you already forgotten

that there is such a thing?" he queried, with irony. "Why, man, this Company that paid for this verra fine Board-table," he explained, with his knuckles on its red baize centre.

Thorpe laughed amusedly. "I paid for that out of my own pocket," he said. "For that matter everything about the Company has come out of my pocket——"

"Or gone into it," suggested the other, and they chuckled together.

"But no—you 're right," Thorpe declared. "Something ought to be settled about the Company, I suppose. Of course I wash my hands of it—but would anybody else want to go on with it? You see its annual working expenses, merely for the office and the Board, foot up nearly £3,000. I 've paid these for this year, but naturally I won't do it again. And would it be worth anybody else's while to do it? Yours, for example?"

"Have you had any explanations with the other Directors?" the Broker asked, thoughtfully.

"Explanations—no," Thorpe told him. "But that 's all right. The Marquis has been taken care of, and so has Plowden. They 're game to agree to anything. And let 's see—Kervick is entirely my man. That leaves Watkin and Davidson—and they don't matter. They 're mere guinea-pigs. A few hundreds apiece would shut them up, if you thought it was worth while to give them anything at all."

"And about the property,—the rubber plantation,—that the Company was formed to acquire and develop. I suppose there really is such a plantation?"

"Oh, yes, it 's all there right enough," Thorpe said, briefly.

"It 's no good, though, is it?" the Broker asked, with affable directness.

"Between ourselves, it is n't worth a damn," the other blithely assured him.

The Scotchman mused with bent brows. "There ought still to be money in it," he said, with an air of conviction.

"By the way," it occurred to Thorpe to mention, "here 's something I did n't understand. I told Rostocker here, just as a cheeky kind of joke, that after he and Aronson had got their eight thousand five hundred, if they thought they 'd like still more shares, I 'd let 'em have 'em at a bargain—and he seemed to take it seriously. He did for a fact. Said perhaps he could make a deal with me."

"Hm-m!" said Semple, reflectively. "I 'll see if he says anything to me. Very likely he 's spotted some way of taking the thing over, and reorganizing it, and giving it another run over the course. I 'll think it out. And now I must be off. Are n't you lunching?"

"No—I 'll have the boy bring in some sandwiches," Thorpe decided. "I want my next meal west of Temple Bar when I get round to it. I 've soured on the City for keeps."

"I would n't say that it had been so bad to you, either," Semple smilingly suggested, as he turned to the door.

Thorpe grinned in satisfied comment. "Hurry back as soon as you 've finally settled with Rostocker and the other fellow," he called after him, and began pacing the floor again.

It was nearly four o'clock when these two men, again together in the Board Room, and having finished the inspection of some papers on the desk, sat upright and looked at each other in tacit recognition that final words were to be spoken.

"Well, Semple," Thorpe began, after that significant

little pause, "I want to say that I 'm damned glad you 've done so well for yourself in this affair. You 've been as straight as a die to me,—I owe it as much to you as I do to myself,—and if you don't think you 've got enough even now, I want you to say so."

He had spoken in tones of sincere liking, and the other answered him in kind. "I have more than I ever dreamed of making in a lifetime when I came to London," he declared. "If my father were alive, and heard me tell him that in one year, out of a single transaction, I had cleared over sixty-five thousand pounds, he 'd be fit to doubt the existence of a Supreme Being. I 'm obliged to you for your good words, Thorpe. It 's not only been profitable to work with you, but it has been a great education and a great pleasure as well."

Thorpe nodded his appreciation. "I 'm going to ask a favour of you," he said. "I want to leave the general run of my investments and interests here in your hands, to keep track of. I don't want to speculate at all, in the ordinary meaning of the word. Even after I bury a pot of money in non-productive real estate, I shall have an income of £50,000 at the very least, and perhaps twice as much. There 's no fun in gambling when you 've got such a bank as that behind you. But if there are good, wise changes to be made in investments, or if things turn up in the way of chances that I ought to know about, I want to feel that you 're on the spot watching things and doing things in my interest. And as it won't be regular broker's work, I shall want to pay you a stated sum—whatever you think is right."

"That will arrange itself easily enough," said Semple. "I shall have the greatest pleasure in caring for whatever you put in my hands. And I think I can promise that it will be none the worse for the keeping."

"I don't need any assurance on that score," Thorpe declared, cordially. "You 're the one sterling, honest man I 've known in the City."

It was the Broker's turn to make a little acknowledging bow. His eyes gleamed frank satisfaction at being so well understood. "I think I see the way that more money can be made out of the Company," he said, abruptly changing the subject. "I 've had but a few words with Rostocker about it—but it 's clear to me that he has a plan. He will be coming to you with a proposition."

"Well, he won't find me, then," interposed Thorpe, with a comfortable smile. "I leave all that to you."

"I suspect that his plan," continued Semple, "is to make a sub-rosa offer of a few shillings for the majority of the shares, and reconstitute the Board, and then form another Company to buy the property and good-will of the old one at a handsome price. Now if that would be a good thing for him to do, it would be a good thing for me to do. I shall go over it all carefully, in detail, this evening. And I suppose, if I see my way clear before me, that I may rely upon your good feeling in the matter. I would do all the work and assume all the risk, and, let us say, divide any profits equally—you in turn giving me a free hand with all your shares, and your influence with the Directors."

"I 'll do better still," Thorpe told him, upon brief reflection. "Reconstitute the Board and make Lord Plowden Chairman,—I don't imagine the Marquis would have the nerve to go on with it,—and I 'll make a free gift of my shares to you two—half and half. You 'll find him all right to work with,—if you can only get him up in the morning,—and I 've kind o' promised him something of the sort. Does that suit you?"

Semple's countenance was thoughtful rather than en-

thusiastic. "I 'm more skeptical about Lords than you are," he observed, "but if he 's amenable, and understands that his part is to do what I tell him to do, I 've no doubt we shall hit it off together."

"Oh, absolutely!" said Thorpe, with confidence. "I 'll see to it that he behaves like a lamb. You 're to have an absolutely free hand. You 're to do what you like,—wind the Company up, or sell it out, or rig it up under a new name and catch a new set of gudgeons with it,—whatever you damned please. When I trust a man, I trust him."

The two friends, their faces brightened and their voices mellowed by this serene consciousness of their mutual trust in each other's loyalty and integrity, dwelt no further upon these halcyon beginnings of a fresh plan for plundering the public. They spoke instead on personal topics—of the possibility of Semple's coming to Scotland during the autumn, and of the chance of Thorpe's wintering abroad. All at once Thorpe found himself disclosing the fact of his forthcoming marriage, though he did not mention the name of the lady's father, and under the gracious stress of this announcement they drank again, and clinked glasses fervently. When Semple at last took his leave, they shook hands with the deep-eyed earnestness of comrades who have been through battle and faced death together.

It was not until Thorpe stood alone that the full realizing sense of what the day meant seemed to come to him. Fruition was finally complete: the last winnowing of the great harvest had been added to the pile. Positively nothing remained for him but to enter and enjoy!

He found it curiously difficult to grasp the thought in its entirety. He stood the master of unlimited leisure for the rest of his life, and of power to enrich that life with

everything that money could buy,—but there was an odd inability to feel about it as he knew he ought to feel.

Somehow, for some unaccountable reason, an absurd depression hovered about over his mind, darkening it with formless shadows. It was as if he were sorry that the work was all finished—that there was nothing more for him to do. But that was too foolish, and he tried to thrust it from him. He said with angry decision to himself that he had never liked the work ; that it had all been unpleasant and grinding drudgery, tolerable only as a means to an end; that now this end had been reached, he wanted never to lay eyes on the City again.

Let him dwell instead upon the things he did want to lay eyes upon. Some travel no doubt he would like, but not too much ; certainly no more than his wife would cheerfully accept as a minimum. He desired rather to rest among his own possessions. To be lord of the manor at Pellesley Court, with his own retinue of servants and dependents and tenants, his own thousands of rich acres, his own splendid old timber, his own fat stock and fleet horses and abundant covers and prize kennels—*that* was what most truly appealed to him. It was not at all certain that he would hunt ; break-neck adventure in the saddle scarcely attracted him. But there was no reason in the world why he should not breed racing horses, and create for himself a distinguished and even lofty position on the Turf. He had never cared much about races or racing folk himself, but when the Prince and Lord Rosebery and people like that went in for winning the Derby, there clearly must be something fascinating in it.

Then Parliament, of course ; he did not waver at all from his old if vague conception of a seat in Parliament as a natural part of the outfit of a powerful country magnate. And in a hundred other ways men should think of him

as powerful, and look up to him. He would go to church every Sunday, and sit in the big Squire's pew. He would be a magistrate as a matter of course, and he would make himself felt on the County Council. He would astonish the county by his charities, and in bad years by the munificence of his reductions in rents. Perhaps if there were a particularly bad harvest, he would decline all over his estate to exact any rent whatever. Fancy what a noble sensation that would make! A Duke could do no more.

It was very clear to him now that he desired to have children of his own,—say two at least, a son and a daughter, or perhaps a son and two daughters: two little girls would be company for each other. As he prefigured these new beings, the son was to exist chiefly for purposes of distinction and the dignity of heirship, and the paternal relations with him would be always somewhat formal, and, though affectionate, unexpansive. But the little girls—they would put their arms round their father's neck, and walk out with him to see the pigs and the dogs, and be the darlings of his heart. He would be an old man by the time they grew up.

A beatific vision of himself took form in his mind—of himself growing grey and pleasurably tired, surrounded by opulence and the demonstrative respect of everybody, smiling with virtuous content as he strolled along between his two daughters, miracles of beauty and tenderness, holding each by a hand.

The entrance of a clerk broke abruptly upon this day-dream. He had a telegram in his hand, and Thorpe, rousing himself with an effort, took the liver-coloured envelope, and looked blankly at it. Some weird apprehension seized upon him, as if he belonged to the peasant class which instinctively yokes telegrams and calamities

together. He deferred to this feeling enough to nod dismissal to the clerk, and then, when he was again alone, slowly opened the message, and read it :

"*Newcastle-on-Tyne, September 12. Our friend died at Edinboro this morning. See you at hotel this evening.—Kervick.*"

What Thorpe felt at first was that his two daughters had shrunk from him with swift, terrible aversion : they vanished, along with every phase of the bright vision, under a pall of unearthly blackness. He stood in the centre of a chill solitude, staring stupidly at the coarse, soft paper.

The premonition, then, had justified itself ! Something had told him that the telegram was an evil thing. A vaguely superstitious consciousness of being in the presence of Fate laid hold upon him. His great day of triumph had its blood-stain. A victim had been needful —and to that end poor simple, silly old Tavender was a dead man. Thorpe could see him,—an embarrassing cadaver eyed by strangers who did not know what to do with it,—fatuous even in death.

A sudden rage at Kervick flamed up. He clearly had played the fool—clumsily over-plying the simpleton with drink till he had killed him. The shadow of murder indubitably hung over the thing. And then—the crass witlessness of telegraphing ! Already, doubtless, the police of Edinborough were talking over the wires with Scotland Yard. A reference to a death in Edinborough, in a telegram from Newcastle—it was incredible that this should escape the eye of the authorities. Any minute might bring a detective through that door there—following into the Board Room with his implacable scent the clue of blood. Thorpe's fancy pictured this detective as

a momentarily actual presence—tall, lean, cold-eyed, mysteriously calm and fatally wise, the omniscient terror of the magazine short-stories.

He turned faint and sick under a spasm of fright. The menace of enquiry became something more than a threat he felt it, like the grip of a constable upon his arm. Everything would be mercilessly unravelled. The telegram of the idiot Kervick would bring the police down upon him like a pack of beagles. The beliefs and surmises of the idiot Gafferson would furnish them with the key to everything. He would have his letter from Tavender to show to the detectives—and the Government's smart lawyers would ferret out the rest. The death of Tavender—they could hardly make him responsible for that; but it was the dramatic feature of this death which would inspire them all to dig up everything about the fraud. It was this same sensational added element of the death, too, which would count with a jury. They were always gross, sentimental fools, these juries. They would mix up the death and the deal in Rubber Consols, and in their fat-headed confusion would say "Penal Servitude—fourteen years." Or no, it was the Judge who fixed that. But the Judges were fools, too; they were too conceited, too puffed up with vanity, to take the trouble to understand. He groaned aloud in a nightmare of helplessness.

The sound of his own voice, moaning in his ears, had a magical effect upon him. He lifted his head, gazed about him, and then flushed deeply. His nerveless cowardice had all at once become unbelievable to himself. With a shamed frown he straightened himself, and stood thus for a long minute, engrossed in the definite task of chasing these phantoms from his mind. Once a manly front was displayed to them, they slunk away with miraculous

facility. He poured out some brandy, and sipped it neat, and laughed scornfully, defiantly, aloud.

He had over half a million—with power and force and courage enough to do with it what he liked. He had fought luck undauntedly, unwearyingly, during all those years when his hands were empty. Was he to tremble and turn tail now, when his hands were full, when he was armoured and weaponed at every point? He was amazed and hurt, and still more enraged, at that fit of girlish weakness which had possessed him. He could have beaten himself with stripes for it. But it could never happen again—never, never!

He told himself that with proud, resolute reiteration, as he got his hat and stick, and put in his pockets one or two papers from the desk, and then glanced about the Board Room for what was, most likely, the last time. Here he had won his great victory over Fate, here he had put his enemies under his feet, and if innocent simpletons had wandered into the company of these foes, it mattered not a whit to him that they also had been crushed. Figuratively, he turned his back upon them now; he left them, slain and trampled, in the Board Room behind him. They no longer concerned him.

Figuratively, too, as he walked with firmness to the door, he stepped over the body of old Tavender, upon the threshold, and bestowed upon it a downward mental glance, and passed on. By the time he reached the street, the memory of Tavender had become the merest shred of a myth. As he strode on, it seemed to him that his daughters came again, and took his hands, and moved lovingly beside him—lovingly and still more admiringly than before.

CHAPTER XXII

BY the autumn of the following year, a certain small proportion of the people inhabiting the district in Hertfordshire which set its clocks by the dial over the stable-tower of Pellesley Court had accustomed themselves to give the place its new name of High Thorpe. These were for the most part the folk of peculiarly facile wits and ready powers of adaptation, like pushing small tradesmen, and the upper servants in county houses. An indolent and hazy compromise upon Pellesley Thorpe had drifted into use by perhaps a larger number. To the puzzled conservatism of the abiding huge majority nearest to the soil—the round-backed, lumpish men who tie strings round their corduroys under the knee, and the strong, cow-faced women who look at passers-by on the road from the doors of dark little cottages, over radiant patches of blossoming garden—it seemed safest to drop family names altogether, and call it merely the Court.

It stood proudly upon what was rather a notable elevation for those flat parts—a massive mansion of simple form, built of a grey stone which seemed at a distance almost white against the deep background of yews and Italian pines behind it. For many miles seaward this pale front was a landmark. From the terrace-walk at its base, one beheld a great expanse of soft green country, sloping gently away for a long distance, then stretching out upon a level which on misty days was interminable. In bright weather, the remote, low-lying horizon had a

defining line of brownish-blue—and this stood for what was left of a primitive forest, containing trees much older than the Norman name it bore. It was a forest which at some time, no doubt, had extended without a break till it merged into that of Epping—leagues away to the south. The modern clearance and tillage, however, which separated it now from Epping had served as a curiously effective barrier—more baffling than the Romans and Angles in their turn had found the original wildwood. No stranger seemed ever to find his way into that broad, minutely-cultivated fertile plain which High Thorpe looked down upon. No railway had pushed its cheapening course across it. Silent, embowered old country roads and lanes netted its expanse with hedgerows ; red points of tiled roofs, distinguishable here and there in clusters among the darker greens of orchards, identified the scattered hamlets—all named in Domesday Book, all seemingly unchanged since. A grey square church-tower emerging from the rooks' nests ; an ordered mass of foliage sheltering the distant gables and chimneys of some isolated house ; the dim perception on occasion that a rustic waggon was in motion on some highway, crawling patiently like an insect—of this placid, inductive nature were all the added proofs of human occupation that the landscape offered.

Mr. Stormont Thorpe, on an afternoon of early October, yawned in the face of this landscape—and then idly wondered a little at the mood which had impelled him to do so. At the outset of his proprietorship he had bound himself, as by a point of honour, to regard this as the finest view from any gentleman's house in England. During the first few months his fidelity had been taxed a good deal, but these temptations and struggles lay now all happily behind him. He had satisfactorily assimilated

the spirit of the vista, and blended it with his own. Its inertia, when one came to comprehend it, was undeniably magnificent, and long ago he had perceived within himself the growth of an answering repose, a responsive lethargy, which in its full development was also going to be very fine. Practically all the land this side of the impalpable line where trees and houses began to fade into the background belonged to him; there were whole villages nestling half-concealed under its shrubberies which were his property. As an investment, these possessions were extremely unremunerative. Indeed, if one added the cost of the improvements which ought to be made, to the expenditure already laid out in renovations, it was questionable if for the next twenty years they would not represent a deficit on the income-sheet. But, now that he had laid hold of the local character, it pleased him that it should be so. He would not for the world have his gentle, woolly-minded, unprofitable cottagers transformed into "hustlers"; it would wound his eye to see the smoke of any commercial chimney, the smudge of any dividend-paying factory, staining the pure tints of the sylvan landscape. He had truly learned to love it.

Yet now, as he strolled on the terrace with his first after luncheon cigar, he unaccountably yawned at the thing he loved. Upon reflection, he had gone to bed rather earlier the previous evening than usual. He had not been drinking out of the ordinary; his liver seemed right enough. He was not conscious of being either tired or drowsy. He looked again at the view with some fixity, and said to himself convincingly that nothing else in England could compare with it. It was the finest thing there was anywhere. Then he surprised himself in the middle of another yawn—and halted abruptly. It occurred to him that he wanted to travel.

Since his home-coming to this splendid new home in the previous January, at the conclusion of a honeymoon spent in Algiers and Egypt, he had not been out of England. There had been a considerable sojourn in London, it is true, at what was described to him as the height of the Season, but looking back upon it, he could not think of it as a diversion. It had been a restless, over-worked, mystifying experience, full of dinners to people whom he had never seen before, and laborious encounters with other people whom he did not particularly want to see again. There had been no physical comfort in it for him, and little more mental satisfaction, for Londoners, or rather people in London, seemed all to be making an invidious distinction in their minds between him and his wife. The fact that she continued to be called Lady Cressage was not of itself important to him. But in the incessant going about in London, their names were called out together so often that his ear grew sensitive and sore to the touch of the footmen's reverberations. The meaning differentiation which the voices of the servants insisted upon, seemed inevitably reflected in the glance and manner of their mistresses. More than anything else, that made him hate London, and barred the doors of his mind to all thoughts of buying a town-house.

His newly-made wife, it is true, had not cared much for London, either, and had agreed to his decision against a town-house almost with animation. The occasion of their return from the hot bustle of the metropolis to these cool home shades—in particular the minute in which, at a bend in the winding carriage-way down below, they had silently regarded together the spectacle uplifted before them, with the big, welcoming house, and the servants on the terrace—had a place of its own in his memory. Edith had pressed his arm, as they sat side by side in the

landau, on the instant compulsion of a feeling they had in common. He had never, before or since, had quite the same assurance that she shared an emotion with him.

He was very far, however, from finding fault with his wife. It was in the nature of the life he chose to lead that he should see a great deal of her, and think a great deal about her, and she bore both tests admirably. If there was a fault to be found, it was with himself for his inability to altogether understand her. She played the part she had undertaken to play with abundant skill and discretion and grace, and even with an air of nice good-fellowship which had some of the aspects of affection. He was vaguely annoyed with himself for having insight enough to perceive that it was a part she was playing, and yet lacking the added shrewdness to divine what her own personal attitude to her *rôle* was like. He had noticed sometimes the way good women looked at their husbands when the latter were talking over their heads—with the eager, intent, non-comprehending admiration of an affectionate dog. This was a look which he could not imagine himself discovering in his wife's eyes. It was not conceivable to him that he should talk over her head. Her glance not only revealed an ample understanding of all he said, but suggested unused reserves of comprehension which he might not fathom. It was as if, intellectually no less than socially, she possessed a title and he remained an undistinguished plebeian.

He made no grievance, however, even in his own thoughts, of either inequality. She had been charmingly frank and fair about the question of the names, when it first arose. The usage had latterly come to be, she explained, for a widow bearing even a courtesy title derived from her late husband, to retain it on marrying again. It was always the easiest course to fall in with usage, but if

he had any feelings on the subject, and preferred to have her insist on being called Mrs. Thorpe, she would meet his wishes with entire willingness. It had seemed to him, as to her, that it was wisest to allow usage to settle the matter. Some months after their marriage there appeared in the papers what purported to be an authoritative announcement that the Queen objected to the practice among ladies who married a second time, of retaining titles acquired by the earlier marriages, and that the lists of precedency at Buckingham Palace would henceforth take this into account. Lady Cressage showed this to her husband, and talked again with candour on the subject. She said she had always rather regretted the decision they originally came to, and even now could wish that it might be altered, but that to effect a change in the face of this newspaper paragraph would seem servile—and in this as in most other things he agreed with her. As she said, they wanted nothing of Buckingham Palace.

She wanted equally little, it seemed, of the society which the neighbouring district might afford. There was a meagre routine of formal calls kept in languid operation, Thorpe knew, but it was so much in the background that he never came in contact with it. His own notions of the part he ought to take in County affairs had undergone a silent and unnoted, yet almost sweeping, change. What little he saw of the gentry and strong local men with whom he would have to work, quietly undermined and dismantled all his ambitions in that direction. They were not his sort; their standards for the measurement of things were unintelligible to him. He did not doubt that, if he set himself about it, he could impose his dominion upon them, any more than he doubted that, if he mastered the Chinese language, he could lift himself to be a Mandarin, but the one would be as unnatural and un-

attractive an enterprise as the other. He came to be upon nodding terms with most of the "carriage-people" round about; some few he exchanged meaningless words with upon occasion, and understood that his wife also talked with, when it was unavoidable, but there his relationship to the County ended, and he was well pleased that it should be so. It gave him a deep satisfaction to see that his wife seemed also well pleased.

He used the word "seemed" in his inmost musings, for it was never quite certain what really did please and displease her. It was always puzzling to him to reconcile her undoubted intellectual activity with the practical emptiness of the existence she professed to enjoy. In one direction, she had indeed a genuine outlet for her energies, which he could understand her regarding in the light of an occupation. She was crazier about flowers and plants than anybody he had ever heard of, and it had delighted him to make over to her, labelled jocosely as the bouquet-fund, a sum of money which, it seemed to him, might have paid for the hanging-gardens of Babylon. It yielded in time—emerging slowly but steadily from a prodigious litter of cement and bricks and mortar and putty, under the hands of innumerable masons, carpenters, glaziers, plumbers, and nondescript subordinates, all of whom talked unwearyingly about nothing at all, and suffered no man to perform any part of his allotted task without suspending their own labours to watch him—an imposing long line of new greenhouses, more than twenty in number. The mail-bag was filled meanwhile with nurserymen's catalogues, and the cart made incessant journeys to and from Punsey station, bringing back vast straw-enwrapped baskets and bundles and boxes beyond counting, the arrival and unpacking of which was with Edith the event of the day. About the reality of her engrossed interest in

all the stages of progress by which these greenhouses became crowded museums of the unusual and abnormal in plant-life, it was impossible to have any suspicion. And even after they were filled to overflowing, Thorpe noted with joy that this interest seemed in no wise to flag. She spent hours every day under the glass, exchanging comments and theories with her gardeners, and even pulling things about with her own hands, and other hours she devoted almost as regularly to supervising the wholesale alterations that had been begun in the gardens outside. There were to be new paths, new walls with a southern exposure, new potting sheds, new forcing pits, new everything—and in the evenings she often worked late over the maps and plans she drew for all this. Thorpe's mind found it difficult to grasp the idea that a lady of such notable qualities could be entirely satisfied by a career among seeds and bulbs and composts, but at least time brought no evidences of a decline in her horticultural zeal. Who knew? Perhaps it might go on indefinitely.

As for himself, he had got on very well without any special inclination or hobby. He had not done any of the great things that a year ago it had seemed to him he would forthwith do—but his mind was serenely undisturbed by regrets. He did not even remember with any distinctness what these things were that he had been going to do. The routine of life—as arranged and borne along by the wise and tactful experts who wore the livery of High Thorpe—was abundantly sufficient in itself. He slept well now in the morning hours, and though he remained still, by comparison, an early riser, the bath and the shaving and slow dressing under the hands of a valet consumed comfortably a good deal of time. Throughout the day he was under the almost constant observation of people who were calling him "master" in their minds, and watching to

see how, in the smallest details of deportment, a "master" carried himself, and the consciousness of this alone amounted to a kind of vocation. The house itself made demands upon him nearly as definite as those of the servants. It was a house of huge rooms, high ceilings, and grandiose fireplaces and stairways, which had seemed to him like a royal palace when he first beheld it, and still produced upon him an effect of undigestible largeness and strangeness. It was as a whole not so old as the agents had represented it, by some centuries, but it adapted itself as little to his preconceived notions of domesticity as if it had been built by Druids. The task of seeming to be at home in it had as many sides to it as there were minutes in the day—and oddly enough, Thorpe found in their study and observance a congenial occupation. Whether he was reading in the library—where there was an admirable collection of books of worth—or walking over the home-farms, or driving in his smart stanhope with the coachman behind, or sitting in formal costume and dignity opposite his beautiful wife at the dinner-table, the sense of what was expected of him was there, steadying and restraining, like an atmospheric pressure.

Thus far they had had few visitors, and had accepted no invitations to join house-parties elsewhere. They agreed without speaking about it that it was more their form to entertain than to be entertained, and certain people were coming to them later in the month. These were quite wholly of Edith's set and selection, for Thorpe had no friends or acquaintances outside her circle for whose presence he had any desire—and among these prospective guests were a Duke and a Duchess. Once, such a fact would have excited Thorpe's imagination. He regarded it now as something appropriate under the circumstances, and gave it little further thought. His placid, satisfied

life was not dependent upon the stir of guests coming and going, even though they were the great of the earth. He walked on his spacious terrace after luncheon—a tall, portly, well-groomed figure of a man, of relaxed, easy aspect, with his big cigar, and his panama hat, and his loose clothes of choice fabrics and exquisite tailoring—and said to himself that it was the finest view in England—and then, to his own surprise, caught himself in the act of yawning.

From under the silk curtains and awning of a window-doorway at the end of the terrace, his wife issued and came toward him. Her head was bare, and she had the grace and fresh beauty of a young girl in her simple light gown of some summery figured stuff.

"What do you say to going off somewhere—tomorrow if you like—travelling abroad?" he called out, as she approached him. The idea, only a moment old in his mind, had grown to great proportions.

"How can we?" she asked, upon the briefest thought. "*They* are coming at the end of the week. This is Monday, and they arrive on the 12th—that 's this Saturday."

"So soon as that!" he exclaimed. "I thought it was later. H-m! I don't know—I think perhaps I 'll go up to London this evening. I 'm by way of feeling restless all at once. Will you come up with me?"

She shook her head. "I can't think of anything in London that would be tolerable."

He gave a vague little laugh. "I shall probably hate it myself when I get there," he speculated. "There is n't anybody I want to see—there is n't anything I want to do. I don't know—perhaps it might liven me up."

Her face took on a look of enquiring gravity. "Are you getting tired of it, then?" She put the question gently, almost cautiously.

He reflected a little. "Why—no," he answered, as if reasoning to himself. "Of course I 'm not. This is what I 've always wanted. It 's my idea of life to a 't.' Only—I suppose everything needs a break in it now and then—if only for the comfort of getting back into the old rut again."

"The rut—yes," she commented, musingly. "Apparently there 's always a rut."

Thorpe gave her the mystified yet uncomplaining glance she knew so well in his eyes. For once, the impulse to throw hidden things up into his range of view prevailed with her.

"Do you know," she said, with a confused half-smile at the novelty of her mood for elucidation, "I fancied a rut was the one thing there could be no question about with you. I had the notion that you were incapable of ruts—and conventional grooves. I thought you—as Carlyle puts it—I thought you were a man who had swallowed all the formulas."

Thorpe looked down at his stomach doubtfully. "I see what you mean," he said at last, but in a tone without any note of conviction.

"I doubt it," she told him, with light readiness—"for I don't see myself what I mean. I forget indeed what it was I said. And so you think you 'll go up to town tonight?"

A sudden comprehension of what was slipping away from his grasp aroused him. "No—no," he urged her, "don't forget what it was you said! I wish you 'd talk more with me about that. It was what I wanted to hear. You never tell me what you 're really thinking about."

She received the reproach with a mildly incredulous smile in her eyes. "Yes—I know—who was it used to scold me about that? Oh"—she seemed suddenly re-

minded of something—" I was forgetting to mention it. I have a letter from Celia Madden. She is back in England ; she is coming to us Saturday, too."

He put out his lips a trifle. " That 's all right," he objected, " but what has it got to do with what we were talking about ? "

" Talking about ? " she queried, with a momentarily blank countenance. " Oh, she used to bully me about my deceit, and treachery, and similar crimes. But I shall be immensely glad to see her. I always fight with her, but I think I like her better than any other woman alive."

" I like her too," Thorpe was impelled to say, with a kind of solemnity. " She reminds me of some of the happiest hours in my life."

His wife, after a brief glance into his face, laughed pleasantly, if with a trace of flippancy. " You say nice things," she observed, slightly inclining her head. " But now that Celia is coming, it would be as well to have another man. It 's such dreadfully short notice, though."

" I daresay your father could come, all right," Thorpe suggested. " I 'd rather have him than almost anyone else. Would you mind asking him—or shall I ? "

An abrupt silence marked this introduction of a subject upon which the couple had differed openly. Thorpe, through processes unaccountable to himself, had passed from a vivid dislike of General Kervick to a habit of mind in which he thoroughly enjoyed having him about. The General had been twice to High Thorpe, and on each occasion had so prolonged his stay that, in retrospect, the period of his absence seemed inconsiderable. The master now, thinking upon it in this minute of silence, was conscious of having missed him greatly. He would not have been bored to the extremity of threatening to go to London, if Kervick had been here. The General was a

gentleman, and yet had the flexible adaptability of a retainer ; he had been trained in discipline, and hence knew how to defer without becoming fulsome or familiar ; he was a man of the world and knew an unlimited number of racy stories, and even if he repeated some of them unduly, they were better than no stories at all. And then, there was his matchless, unfailing patience in playing chess or backgammon or draughts or bezique, whatever he perceived that the master desired.

" If you really wish it," Edith said at last, coldly.

" But that 's what I don't understand," Thorpe urged upon her with some vigour. " If I like him, I don't see why his own daughter——"

" Oh, need we discuss it ? " she broke in, impatiently. " If I 'm an unnatural child, why then I am one, and may it not be allowed to pass at that ? " A stormy kind of smile played upon her beautifully-cut lips as she added : " Surely one's filial emotions are things to be taken for granted—relieved from the necessity of explanation."

Thorpe grinned faintly at the hint of pleasantry, but he did not relinquish his point. " Well—unless you really veto the thing—I think I 'd like to tell him to come," he said, with composed obstinacy. Upon an afterthought he added : " There 's no reason why he should n't meet the Duke, is there ? "

" No specific reason," she returned, with calm coolness of tone and manner. " And certainly I do not see myself in the part of Madame Veto."

" All right then—I 'll send him a wire," said Thorpe. His victory made him uneasy, yet he saw no way of abandoning it with decorum.

As the two, standing in a silence full of tacit constraint, looked aimlessly away from the terrace, they saw at the same instant a vehicle with a single horse coming rather

briskly up the driveway, some hundreds of yards below. It was recognizable at once as the local trap from Punsey station, and as usual it was driven by a boy from the village. Seated beside this lad was a burly, red-bearded man in respectable clothes, who, to judge from the tin-box and travelling-bags fastened on behind, seemed coming to High Thorpe to stay.

"Who on earth is that?" asked Thorpe, wonderingly. The man was obviously of the lower class, yet there seemed something about him which invited recognition.

"Presumably it 's the new head-gardener," she replied with brevity.

Her accent recalled to Thorpe the fact that there had been something disagreeable in their conversation, and the thought of it was unpleasant to him. "Why, I did n't know you had a new man coming," he said, turning to her with an overture of smiling interest.

"Yes," she answered, and then, as if weighing the proffered propitiation and rejecting it, turned slowly and went into the house.

The trap apparently ended its course at some back entrance: he did not see it again. He strolled indoors, after a little, and told his man to pack a bag for London, and order the stanhope to take him to the train.

CHAPTER XXIII

IN the early morning, long before any of the hotel people had made themselves heard moving about, Thorpe got up.

It was a long time since he had liked himself and his surroundings so little. The bed seemed all right to the eye, and even to the touch, but he had slept very badly in it, none the less. The room was luxuriously furnished, as was the entire suite, but it was all strange and uncomfortable to his senses. The operation of shaving and dressing in solitude produced an oppression of loneliness. He regretted not having brought his man with him for this reason, and then, upon meditation, for other reasons. A person of his position ought always to have a servant with him. The hotel people must have been surprised at his travelling unattended—and the people at High Thorpe must also have thought it strange. It flashed across his mind that no doubt his wife had most of all thought it strange. How would she explain to herself his sudden, precipitate journey to London alone? Might she not quite naturally put an unpleasant construction upon it? It was bad enough to have to remember that they had parted in something like a tiff; he found it much worse to be fancying the suspicions with which she would be turning over his mysterious absence in her mind.

He went downstairs as speedily as possible and, discovering no overt signs of breakfast in the vicinity of the restaurant, passed out and made his way to the Embank-

ment. This had been a favourite walk of his in the old days—but he considered it now with an unsympathetic eye. It seemed a dry and haggard and desolate-looking place by comparison with his former impressions of it. The morning was grey-skied, but full of a hard quality of light, which brought out to the uncompromising uttermost the dilapidated squalor of the Surrey side. The water was low, and from the mud and ooze of the ugly opposite shore, or perhaps from the discoloured stream itself, there proceeded a smell which offended his unaccustomed nostril. A fitful, gusty wind was blowing from the east, and ever and again it gathered dust in eddying swoops from the roadway, and flung it in his face.

He walked on toward the City, without any conscious purpose, and with no very definite reflections. It occurred to him that if his wife did impute to him some unworthy motive in stealing off to London, and made herself unhappy in doing so—that would at least provide the compensation of showing that she cared. The thought, however, upon examination, contained very meagre elements of solace. He could not in the least be sure about any of the workings of her mind. There might be more or less annoyance mixed up this morning with the secret thoughts she had concerning him—or she might not be bothering her head about him at all. This latter contingency had never presented itself so frankly to him before. He looked hard at it, and saw more semblances of probability about it than he liked. It might very well be that she was not thinking about him one way or the other.

A depressing consciousness that practically nobody need think about him pervaded his soul. Who cared what he said or did or felt? The City had forgotten his very existence. In the West End, only here and there some per-

son might chance to remember his name as that of some rich bounder who had married Lady Cressage. Nowhere else in England, save one dull strip of agricultural blankness in a backward home county, was there a human being who knew anything whatever about him. And this was his career! It was for this that he had planned that memorable campaign, and waged that amazing series of fortnightly battles, never missing victory, never failing at any point of the complicated strategy, and crowning it all with a culminating triumph which had been the wonder and admiration of the whole financial world! A few score of menials or interested inferiors bowed to him; he drove some good horses, and was attentively waited upon, and had a never-failing abundance of good things to eat and drink and smoke. Hardly anything more than that, when you came to think of it—and the passing usufruct of all these things could be enjoyed by any fool who had a ten-pound note in his pocket!

What gross trick had the fates played on him? He had achieved power—and where was that power? What had he done with it? What *could* he do with it? He had an excess of wealth, it was true, but in what way could it command an excess of enjoyment? The very phrase was a paradox, as he dimly perceived. There existed only a narrow margin of advantage in favour of the rich man. He could eat and drink a little more and a little better than the poor man; he could have better clothes, and lie abed later in the morning, and take life easier all round—but only within hard and fast bounds. There was an ascertained limit beyond which the millionaire could no more stuff himself with food and wine than could the beggar. It might be pleasant to take an added hour or two in bed in the morning, but to lie in bed all day would be an infliction. So it ran indefinitely—this thin selvedge

of advantage which money could buy—with deprivation on the one side, and surfeit on the other. Candidly, was it not true that more happiness lay in winning the way out of deprivation, than in inventing safeguards against satiety? The poor man succeeding in making himself rich—at numerous stages of the operation there might be made a moral snap-shot of the truly happy man. But not after he had reached the top. Then disintegration began at once. The contrast between what he supposed he could do, and what he finds it possible to do, is too vast to be accepted with equanimity.

It must be said that after breakfast—a meal which he found in an Italian restaurant of no great cleanliness or opulence of pretension, and ate with an almost novel relish—Thorpe took somewhat less gloomy views of his position. He still walked eastward, wandering into warehouse and shipping quarters skirting the river, hitherto quite unknown to him, and pursuing in an idle, inconsequent fashion his meditations. He established in his mind the proposition that since an excess of enjoyment was impossible—since one could not derive a great block of happiness from the satisfaction of the ordinary appetites, but at the most could only gather a little from each—the desirable thing was to multiply as much as might be those tastes and whims and fancies which passed for appetites, and thus expand the area of possible gratification.

This seemed very logical indeed, but it did not apply itself to his individual needs with much facility. What did he want to do that he had not done? It was difficult for him to say. Perhaps it was chandlers' signs and windows about him, and the indefinable seafaring preoccupation suggested by the high-walled, narrow streets, which raised the question of a yacht in his mind. Did he want a yacht? He could recall having once dwelt with great

fondness upon such a project: doubtless it would still be full of attractions for him. He liked the water, and the water liked him—and he was better able now than formerly to understand how luxurious existence can be made in modern private ships. He decided that he would have a yacht—and then perceived that the decision brought no exhilaration. He was no happier than before. He could decide that he would have anything he chose to name—and it would in no whit lighten his mood. The yacht might be as grand as High Thorpe, and relatively as spacious and well ordered, but would he not grow as tired of the one as he had of the other?

He stopped short at this blunt self-expression of something he had never admitted to himself. Was he indeed tired of High Thorpe? He had assured his wife to the contrary yesterday. He reiterated the assurance to his own mind now. It was instead that he was tired of himself. He carried a weariness about with him, which looked at everything with apathetic eyes, and cared for nothing. Some nameless paralysis had settled upon his capacity for amusement and enjoyment, and atrophied it. He had had the power to expand his life to the farthest boundaries of rich experience and sensation, and he had deliberately shrunk into a sort of herbaceous nonentity, whom nobody knew or cared about. He might have had London at his beck and call, and yet of all that the metropolis might mean to a millionaire, he had been able to think of nothing better than that it should send old Kervick to him, to help beguile his boredom with dominoes and mess-room stories! Pah! He was disgusted with himself.

Striking out a new course, with the Monument as his guide, he presently came into a part of the City which had a certain familiarity for him. He walked up St.

Swithin's Lane, looking at the strange forms of foreign fruit exposed at the shop-doors, and finding in them some fleeting recurrence of the hint that travel was what he needed. Then he stopped, to look through the railings and open gateway at an enclosure on the left, and the substantial, heavily-respectable group of early Victorian buildings beyond. Some well-dressed men were standing talking in one of the porches. The stiff yellowish-stucco pilasters of this entrance, and the tall uniformed figure of the porter in the shadow, came into the picture as he observed it; they gave forth a suggestion of satisfied smugness—of orderly but altogether unillumined routine. Nothing could be more commonplace to the eye.

Yet to his imagination, eighteen months before, what mysterious marvels of power had lurked hidden behind those conventional portals! Within those doors, in some inner chamber, sat men whose task it was to direct the movements of the greatest force the world had ever known. They and their cousins in Paris and Frankfort, or wherever they lived, between them wielded a vaster authority than all the Parliaments of the earth. They could change a government, or crush the aspirations of a whole people, or decide a question of peace or war, by the silent dictum of their little family council. He remembered now how he had stood on this same spot, and stared with fascinated gaze at this quadrangle of dull houses, and pondered upon what it must feel like to be a Rothschild—and that was only a little over a year ago!

There was no sense of fascination whatever in his present gaze. He found himself regarding instead, with a kind of detached curiosity, the little knot of men in frock-coats and silk-hats who stood talking in the doorway. It was barely ten o'clock, yet clearly business was proceeding within. One of these persons whom he beheld might be

a Rothschild, for aught he knew ; at any rate, it was presumable that some of them were on the premises. He had heard it said that the very head of the house listened to quotations from the tape while he ate his luncheon, and interrupted his conversations with the most important of non-commercial callers, to make or refuse bargains in shares offered by brokers who came in. What impulse lay behind this extraordinary devotion to labour? Toward what conceivable goal could it be striving?

To work hard and risk great things for the possession of a fortune, in order to enjoy it afterward—he could understand how that attracted men. But to possess already the biggest of human fortunes, and still work—that baffled him. He wished he knew some of those men in there, especially if they belonged to the place. It would be wonderfully interesting to get at the inner point of view of New Court.

A little later, in Colin Semple's office, he sat down to await the coming of that gentleman. "Then he does n't get here so early nowadays?" he suggested to the head-clerk who, with instant recognition and exaggerated deference, had ushered him into this furthermost private room. It pleased him to assume that prosperity had relaxed the Scotchman's vigilance.

"Oh yes, sir," the clerk replied. "A bit earlier if anything, as a rule. But I think he is stopping at his solicitors on his way to the City. I hope you are very well, sir."

"Yes—I 'm very fit—thanks," Thorpe said, listlessly, and the other left him.

Mr. Semple, when at last he arrived, bustled into the room with unaffected gratification at the news he had heard without. "Well, well, Thorpe man!" he cried, and shook hands cordially. "This is fine! If I 'd only

known you were in town! Why would n't you have told me you were coming? I 'd never have kept you waiting."

Thorpe laughed wearily. "I hardly knew I was in town myself. I only ran up last night. I thought it would amuse me to have a look round—but things seem as dull as ditchwater."

"Oh no," said Semple, "the autumn is opening verra well indeed. There are more new companies, and a better public subscription all round, than for any first week of October I remember. Westralians appear bad on the face of things, it 's true—but don't believe all you hear of them. There 's more than the suspicion of a 'rig' there. Besides, you have n't a penny in them."

"I was n't thinking of that," Thorpe told him, with comprehensive vagueness. "Well, I suppose you 're still coining money," he observed, after a pause.

"Keeping along—keeping along," the broker replied, cheerfully. "I canna complain."

Thorpe looked at him with a meditative frown. "Well, what are you going to do with it, after you 've got it?" he demanded, almost with sharpness.

The Scotchman, after a surprised instant, smiled. "Oh, I 'll just keep my hands on it," he assured him, lightly.

"That is n't what I mean," Thorpe said, groping after what he did mean, with sullen tenacity, among his thoughts. His large, heavy face exhibited a depressed gravity which attracted the other's attention.

"What 's the matter?" Semple asked quickly. "Has anything gone wrong with you?"

Thorpe slowly shook his head. "What better off do you think you 'll be with six figures than you are with five?" he pursued, with dogmatic insistence.

Semple shrugged his shoulders. He seemed to have

grown much brighter and gayer of mood in this past twelvemonth. Apparently he was somewhat stouter, and certainly there was a mellowed softening of his sharp glance and shrewd smile. It was evident that his friend's mood somewhat nonplussed him, but his good-humour was unflagging.

"It 's the way we 're taught at school," he hazarded, genially. "In all the arithmetics six beats five, and seven beats six."

"They 're wrong," Thorpe declared, and then consented to laugh in a grudging, dogged way at his friend's facial confession of puzzlement. "What I mean is—what 's the good of piling up money, while you can't pile up the enjoyments it will buy? What will a million give you, that the fifth of it, or the tenth of it, won't give you just as well?"

"Aye," said Semple, with a gleam of comprehension in his glance. "So you 've come to that frame of mind, have you? Why does a man go on and shoot five hundred pheasants, when he can eat only one?"

"Oh, if you like the mere making of money, I 've nothing more to say," Thorpe responded, with a touch of resentment. "I 've always thought of you as a man like myself, who wanted to make his pile and then enjoy himself."

The Scotchman laughed joyously. "Enjoy myself! Like you!" he cried. "Man, you 're as doleful as a mute at a laird's funeral! What 's come over you? I know what it is. You go and take a course of German waters——"

"Oh, that be damned!" Thorpe objected, gloomily. "I tell you I 'm all right. Only—only—God! I 've a great notion to go and get drunk."

Colin Semple viewed his companion with a more sym-

pathetic expression. "I 'm sorry you 're so hipped," he said, in gentle tones. "It can't be more than some passing whimsy. You 're in no real trouble, are you?—no family trouble?"

Thorpe shook his head. "The whole thing is rot!" he affirmed, enigmatically.

"What whole thing?" The broker perched on the edge of his desk, and with patient philosophy took him up. "Do you mean eighty thousand a year is rot? That depends upon the man who has it."

"I know that well enough," broke in the other, heavily. "That 's what I 'm kicking about. I 'm no good!"

Semple, looking attentively down upon him, pursed his lips in reflection. "That 's not the case," he observed with argumentative calmness. "You 're a great deal of good. I 'm not so sure that what you 've been trying to do is any good, though. Come!—I read you like large print. You 've set out to live the life of a rich country squire—and it has n't come off. It could n't come off! I never believed it would. You have n't the taste for it inbred in your bones. You have n't the thousand little habits and interests that they take in with their mother's milk, and that make such a life possible. When you look at a hedge, you don't think of it as something to worry live animals out of. When you see one of your labourers, you don't care who his father was, or which dairymaid his uncle ought to have married, if he had wanted to get a certain cottage. You don't want to know the name of everybody whose roof you can see; much less could you remember them, and talk about them, and listen to gossip about them, year after year. It is n't a passion in your blood to ride to hounds, and to shoot, and all that. It does n't come to you by tradition—and you have n't the vacancy of mind which might be a substitute for tradition.

What are you doing in the country, then? Just eating too much, and sitting about, and getting fat and stupid. If you want the truth, there it is for you."

Thorpe, putting out his lips judicially, inclined upon reflection to the view that this was the truth. "That 's all right, as far as it goes," he assented, with hesitation. "But what the hell else is there?"

The little Scotchman had grown too interested in his diagnosis to drop it in an incomplete state. "A year ago," he went on, "you had won your victories like a veritable Napoleon. You had everything in your own hands; Napoleon himself was not more the master of what he saw about him than you were. And then what did you do? You voluntarily retired yourself to your Elba. It was n't that you were beaten and driven there by others; you went of your own accord. Have you ever thought, Thorpe, of this? Napoleon was the greatest man of his age—one of the greatest men of all ages—not only in war but in a hundred other ways. He spent the last six years of his life at St. Helena—in excellent health and with companions that he talked freely to—and in all the extraordinarily copious reports of his conversations there, we don't get a single sentence worth repeating. If you read it, you 'll see he talked like a dull, ordinary body. The greatness had entirely evaporated from him, the moment he was put on an island where he had nothing to do."

"Yes-s," said Thorpe, thoughtfully. He accepted the application without any qualms about the splendour of the comparison it rested upon. He had done the great things, just as Semple said, and there was no room for false modesty about them in his mind. "The trouble is," he began, "that I did what I had always thought I wanted to do most. I was quite certain in my mind that

that was what I wanted. And if we say now that I was wrong—if we admit that that was n't what I really wanted—why then, God knows what it is I *do* want. I 'll be hanged if *I* do ! "

" Come back to the City," Semple told him. " That 's where you belong."

" No—no ! " Thorpe spoke with emphasis. " That 's where you 're all off. I don't belong in the City at all. I hate the whole outfit. What the devil amusement would it be to me to take other men's money away from them ? I 'd be wanting all the while to give it back to them. And certainly I would n't get any fun out of their taking my money away from me. Besides, it does n't entertain me. I 've no taste at all for it. I never look at a financial paper now. I could no more interest myself in all that stuff again than I could fly. That 's the hell of it—to be interested in anything."

" Go in for politics," the other suggested, with less warmth.

" Yes, I know," Thorpe commented, with a lingering tone. " Perhaps I ought to think more about that. By the way, what 's Plowden doing ? I 've lost all track of him."

" Abroad somewhere, I fancy," Semple replied. His manner exhibited a profound indifference. " When his mother died he came into something—I don't know how much. I don't think I 've seen him since—and that must have been six months and more ago."

" Yes. I heard about it at the time," the other said. " It must be about that. His sister and brother—the young Plowdens—they 're coming to us at the end of the week, I believe. You did n't hit it off particularly with Plowden, eh ? "

Semple emitted a contemptuous little laugh. " I did

not quarrel with him—if you mean that," he said, "but even to please you, Thorpe, I could n't bring myself to put my back into the job of making money for him. He was treated fairly—even generously, d' ye mind. I should think, all told, he had some thirty thousand pounds for his shares, and that 's a hundred times as much as I had a pleasure in seeing him get. Each man can wear his own parasites, but it 's a task for him to stand another man's. I shook your Lord Plowden off, when the chance came."

"*That 's* all right," Thorpe assured him, easily. "I never told you that he was any good. I merely felt like giving him a leg up—because really at the start he was of use to me. I did owe him something. . . . It was at his house that I met my wife."

"Aye," said Semple, with dispassionate brevity.

CHAPTER XXIV

WHEN he had parted with Semple, at a corner where the busy broker, who had walked out with him, obviously fidgeted to get away, Thorpe could think of no one else in the City whom he desired to see. A call upon his bankers would, he knew, be made an occasion of extremely pleasant courtesy by those affable people, but upon reflection it seemed scarcely worth the trouble.

He was in a mood for indolent sauntering, and he made the long stretch of the Holborn thoroughfare in a leisurely fashion, turning off when the whim seized him into odd courts and alley-ways to see what they were like. After luncheon, he continued his ramble, passing at last from St. Giles, through avenues which had not existed in the London of his boyhood, to the neighbourhood of the Dials. Here also the landmarks seemed all changed, but there was still enough ostentatious squalor and disorder to identify the district. He observed it and its inhabitants with a certain new curiosity. A notable alteration for the better had come over his spirits. It might be the champagne at luncheon, or it might be the mere operation of a frank talk with Semple, that had dissipated his gloom. At all events it was gone—and he strolled along in quite placid contentment, taking in the panorama of London's more intimate life with the interest of a Londoner who has obtained a fresh country eye.

He who had seen most of the world, and not cared much about the spectacle, found himself now consciously

enjoying observation as he had not supposed it possible to do. He surrendered himself to the experience with a novel sense of having found something worth while—and found it, moreover, under his very nose. In some dull, meaningless fashion he had always known this part of London, and been familiar with its external aspects. Now suddenly he perceived that the power had come to him of seeing it all in a different way. The objects he beheld, inanimate and otherwise, had specific new meanings for him. His mind was stirred pleasurably by the things they said to him.

He looked at all the contents of the windows as he passed ; at the barrows of the costers and hawkers crowding up the side-streets ; at the coarse-haired, bare-headed girls and women standing about in their shawls and big white aprons ; at the weakling babies in their arms or about the thick, clumsy folds of their stained skirts ; at the grimy, shuffling figures of their men-folk, against the accustomed background of the public-house corner, with its half-open door, and its fly-blown theatre-bills in the windows ; at the drivers of the vans and carts, sleepily overlooking the huge horses, gigantic to the near view as some survival from the age of mammoths, which pushed gingerly, ploddingly, their tufted feet over the greasy stones ; at foul interiors where through the blackness one discerned bent old hags picking over refuse ; at the faces which, as he passed, made some special human appeal to him—faces blurred with drink, faces pallid with underfeeding, faces worn into masks by the tension of trouble, faces sweetened by resignation, faces aglow with devil-may-care glee . . . he looked, as it were, into the pulsing heart of something which had scarcely seemed alive to him before.

Eventually, he found himself halting at the door of his

sister's book-shop. A new boy stood guard over the stock exposed on the shelf and stands outside, and he looked stonily at the great man ; it was evident that he was as far from suspecting his greatness as his relationship. It pleased Thorpe for a little to take up one book after another, and pretend to read from it, and force the boy to watch him hard. He had almost the temptation to covertly slip a volume into his pocket, and see what the lad would do. It was remarkable, he reflected with satisfaction—this new capacity within him to find drama in trifles.

There floated into his mind the recollection of some absurd squabble he had had with his sister about the sign overhead. He stepped back a few paces and looked up at it. There were the old words—" Thorpe, Bookseller "—right enough, but they seemed to stand forth with a novel prominence. Upon a second glance, he saw that the board had been repainted. At this he laughed aloud. The details of the episode came back to him now. For some reason, or no reason at all—he could not now imagine what on earth could have prompted him—he had last spring caused his sister to be informed of his wish that her own name, Dabney, should be substituted for that of Thorpe on her sign. It was to Julia that he had confided this mission, and it was Julia who, in a roundabout way, had disclosed to him presently her mother's deep resolution to do nothing of the sort. He laughed again at the added defiance that this refurbishing of the old sign expressed, and still was grinning broadly as he entered the shop and pushed his way along to the rear.

She stood beside her desk as she seemed to have stood ever since he could remember her—tall, placid, dull-eyed, self-sufficient, exhaling as it were a kind of stubborn yet competent listlessness. Her long, mannish countenance

expressed an undoubted interest in his presence, when she recognized him, but he had no clear perception whether it was pleased or otherwise. In their infrequent latter-day encounters he had dropped the habit of kissing her, and there was certainly no hint in her manner of expecting, much less inviting, its renewal now—but upon a sudden impulse he drew her to him with an arm flung round her gaunt waist, smacked his lips with effusion upon her cheek.

Her surprise, as she withdrew herself somewhat forcefully from his embrace, was plain enough. "Well!" she exclaimed vaguely, and then looked at him. "You 're getting fatter."

"No I 'm not," he rejoined, with the earnestness belonging to an important topic. "People think I am—but it 's merely the looseness of these clothes. There 's really no difference since I was here last."

The glance they exchanged was so full of the tacit comment that this last visit was a long time ago, that Thorpe put it into words. "Let 's see—that was just before Christmas, was n't it?" he said.

"Something like that," she responded. "You were going to get married in a week or two, I remember, and *that* was in January, was n't it? I was taking stock, I know."

He nodded in turn. The thought that his only sister recalled his marriage merely as a date, like a royal anniversary or a bank-holiday, and held herself implacably aloof from all contact with his domestic life, annoyed him afresh. "You 're an awful goat, not to come near us," he felt impelled, in brotherly frankness, to tell her.

She put out her lips, and wagged her head a little, in a gesture which it flashed across him his own mirror might

often have recorded. "I thought that was all settled and done with long ago," she said, moodily.

"Oh, I won't worry you with it, Lou," he observed, with reassuring kindness of tone. "I never felt so much like being nice to you in my life."

She seemed surprised at this, too, and regarded him with a heavy new fixity of gaze. No verbal comment, apparently, occurred to her.

"Julia and Alfred all right?" he queried, cheerfully.

"I daresay," she made brief answer.

"But they write to you, don't they?"

"*She* does—sometimes. They seem to be doing themselves very well, from what she says."

"She 'd write oftener, if you 'd answer her letters," he told her, in tones of confidential reproach.

"Oh, I don't write letters unless I 've got something to say," she answered, as if the explanation were ample.

The young people were domiciled for the time being at Dusseldorf, where Alfred had thought he would most like to begin his Continental student-career, and where Julia, upon the more or less colourable pretext of learning the language, might enjoy the mingled freedom and occupation of a home of her own. They had taken a house for the summer and autumn, and would do the same in Dresden or Munich, later on, for the winter.

"What I would really have liked," Thorpe confided to his sister now, "was to have had them both live with me. They would have been as welcome as the day is long. I could see, of course, in Alfred's case, that if he 's set on being an artist, he ought to study abroad. Even the best English artists, he says, do that at the beginning. So it was all right for him to go. But Julia—it was different with her—I was rather keen about her staying. My wife was just as keen as I was. She took the greatest fancy to

Julia from the very start—and so far as I could see, Julia liked her all right. In fact, I thought Julia would want to stay—but somehow she did n't."

"She always spoke very highly of your wife," Mrs. Dabney affirmed with judicial fairness. "I think she does like her very much."

"Well then what did she want to hyke off to live among those Dutchmen for, when one of the best houses in England was open to her?" Thorpe demanded.

"You must n't ask *me*," her mother responded. Her tone seemed to carry the suggestion that by silence she could best protect her daughter's interests.

"I don't believe you know any more about it than I do," was his impulsive comment.

"I daresay not," she replied, with indifference. "Probably she did n't fancy living in so big a house—although heaven knows her ideas are big enough about most things."

"Did she say so?" Thorpe asked abruptly.

The widow shook her head with dispassionate candour. "She did n't say anything to me about it, one way or the other. I formed my own impressions—that 's all. It 's a free country. Everybody can form their impressions."

"I wish you 'd tell me what you really think," Thorpe urged her, mildly persuasive. "You know how fond I am of Julia, and how little I want to do her an injustice."

"Oh, she would n't feel *that* way," Louisa observed, vaguely. "If you ask me plain, I think it was dull for her."

"Well," said Thorpe, upon reflection, "I should n't be surprised if it was. I had n't thought of that. But still—why she and my wife could be company for each other."

"You talk as if life was merely a long railway journey,"

she told him, in an unexpected flight of metaphor. "Two women cooped up in a lonesome country house may be a little less lonely than one of them by herself would be—but not much. It 's none of my business—but how your wife must hate it!"

He laughed easily. "Ah, that 's where you 're wrong," he said. "She does n't care about anything but gardening. That 's her hobby. She 's crazy about it. We 've laid out more in new greenhouses alone, not counting the plants, than would rebuild this building. I 'm not sure the heating apparatus would n't come to that, alone. And then the plants! What do you think of six and eight guineas for a single root? Those are the amaryllises—and if you come to orchids, you can pay hundreds if you like. Well, that 's her passion. That 's what she really loves."

"That 's what she seizes upon to keep her from just dying of loneliness," Louisa retorted, obstinately, and at a sign of dissent from her brother she went on. "Oh, I know what I 'm talking about. I have three or four customers—ladies in the country, and one of them is a lady of title, too—and they order gardening books and other books through me, and when they get up to town, once a year or so, they come here and they talk to me about it. And there is n't one of them that at the bottom of her heart does n't hate it. They 'd rather dodge busses at Charing Cross corner all day long, than raise flowers as big as cheeses, if they had their own way. But they don't have their own way, and they must have something to occupy themselves with—and they take to gardening. I daresay I 'd even do it myself if I had to live in the country, which thank God I don't!"

"That 's because you don't know anything about the country," he told her, but the retort, even while it justi-

fied itself, had a hollow sound in his own ears. "All you know outside of London is Margate."

"I went to Yarmouth and Lowestoft this summer," she informed him, crushingly.

Somehow he lacked the heart to laugh. "I know what you mean, Lou," he said, with an affectionate attempt at placation. "I suppose there 's a good deal in what you say. It *is* dull, out there at my place, if you have too much of it. Perhaps that 's a good hint about my wife. It never occurred to me, but it may be so. But the deuce of it is, what else is there to do? We tried a house in London, during the Season——"

"Yes, I saw in the papers you were here," she said impassively, in comment upon his embarrassed pause.

"I did n't look you up, because I did n't think you wanted much to see me"—he explained with a certain awkwardness—"but bye-gones are all bye-gones. We took a town house, but we did n't like it. It was one endless procession of stupid and tiresome calls and dinners and parties; we got awfully sick of it, and swore we would n't try it again. Well there you are, don't you see? It 's stupid in Hertfordshire, and it 's stupid here. Of course one can travel abroad, but that 's no good for more than a few months. Of course it would be different if I had something to do. I tell you God's truth, Lou—sometimes I feel as if I was really happier when I was a poor man. I know it 's all rot—I really was n't—but sometimes it *seems* as if I was."

She contemplated him with a leaden kind of gaze. "Did n't it ever occur to you to do some good with your money?" she said, with slow bluntness. Then, as if fearing a possible misconception, she added more rapidly: "I don't mean among your own family. We 're a clannish people, we Thorpes; we 'd always help our own flesh

and blood, even if we kicked them while we were doing it —but I mean outside, in the world at large."

"What have I got to do with the world at large? I did n't make it; I 'm not responsible for it." He muttered the phrases lightly enough, but a certain fatuity in them seemed to attract his attention when he heard their sound. "I 've given between five and six thousand pounds to London hospitals within the present year," he added, straightening himself. "I wonder you did n't see it. It was in all the papers."

"Hospitals!"

It was impossible to exaggerate the scorn which her voice imported into the word. He looked at her with unfeigned surprise, and then took in the impression that she was upon a subject which exceptionally interested her. Certainly the display of something approaching animation in her glance and manner was abnormal.

"I said 'do some *good* with your money,'" she reminded him, still with a vibration of feeling in her tone. "You *must* live in the country, if you think London hospitals are deserving objects. They could n't fool Londoners on that point, not if they had got the Prince to go on his hands and knees. And you give a few big cheques to them," she went on, meditatively, "and you never ask how they 're managed, or what rings are running them for their own benefit, or how your money is spent—and you think you 've done a noble, philanthropic thing! Oh no —I was n't talking about humbug charity. I was talking about doing some genuine good in the world."

He put his leg over the high stool, and pushed his hat back with a smile. "All right," he said, genially. "What do you propose?"

"I don't propose anything," she told him, after a moment 's hesitation. "You must work that out for your-

self. What might seem important to me might not interest you at all—and if you were n't interested you would n't do anything. But this I do say to you, Joel—and I 've said it to myself every day for this last year or more, and had you in mind all the time, too—if I had made a great fortune, and I sat about in purple and fine linen doing nothing but amuse myself in idleness and selfishness, letting my riches accumulate and multiply themselves without being of use to anybody, I should be *ashamed* to look my fellow-creatures in the face! You were born here. You know what London slums are like. You know what Clare Market was like—it 's bad enough still—and what the Seven Dials and Drury Lane and a dozen other places round here are like to this day. That 's only within a stone's throw. Have you seen Charles Booth's figures about the London poor? Of course you have n't—and it does n't matter. You *know* what they are like. But you don't care. The misery and ignorance and filth and hopelessness of two or three hundred thousand people does n't interest you. You sit upon your money-bags and smile. If you want the truth, I 'm ashamed to have you for a brother!"

"Well, I 'm damned!" was Thorpe's delayed and puzzled comment upon this outburst. He looked long at his sister, in blank astonishment. "Since when have you been taken this way?" he asked at last, mechanically jocular.

"That 's all right," she declared with defensive inconsequence. "It 's the way I feel. It 's the way I 've felt from the beginning."

He was plainly surprised out of his equanimity by this unlooked-for demonstration on his sister's part. He got off the stool and walked about in the little cleared space round the desk. When he spoke, it was to utter some-

thing which he could trace to no mental process of which he had been conscious.

"How do you know that that is n't what I 've felt too —from the beginning?" he demanded of her, almost with truculence. "You say I sit on my money-bags and smile —you abuse me with doing no good with my money—how do you know I have n't been studying the subject all this while, and making my plans, and getting ready to act? You never did believe in me!"

She sniffed at him. "I don't believe in you now, at all events," she said, bluntly.

He assumed the expression of a misunderstood man. "Why, this very day"—he began, and again was aware that thoughts were coming up, ready-shaped to his tongue, which were quite strangers to his brain—"this whole day I 've been going inch by inch over the very ground you mention; I 've been on foot since morning, seeing all the corners and alleys of that whole district for myself, watching the people and the things they buy and the way they live—and thinking out my plans for doing something. I don't claim any credit for it. It seems to me no more than what a man in my position ought to do. But I own that to come in, actually tired out from a tramp like that, and get blown-up by one's own sister for selfishness and heartlessness and miserliness and all the rest of it—I must say, that 's a bit rum."

Louisa did not wince under this reproach as she might have been expected to do, nor was there any perceptible amelioration in the heavy frown with which she continued to regard him. But her words, uttered after some consideration, came in a tone of voice which revealed a desire to avoid offense. "It won't matter to you, your getting blown-up by me, if you 're really occupying your mind with that sort of thing. You 're too used to it for that."

He would have liked a less cautious acceptance of his assurances than this—but after all, one did not look to Louisa for enthusiasms. The depth of feeling she had disclosed on this subject of London's poor still astonished him, but principally now because of its unlikely source. If she had been notoriously of an altruistic and free-handed disposition, he could have understood it. But she had been always the hard, dry, unemotional one ; by comparison with her, he felt himself to be a volatile and even sentimental person. If she had such views as these, it became clear to him that his own views were even much advanced.

" It 's a tremendous subject," he said, with loose largeness of manner. " Only a man who works hard at it can realize how complicated it is. The only way is to start with the understanding that something is going to be done. No matter how many difficulties there are in the way, *something 's going to be done!* If a strong man starts out with that, why then he can fight his way through, and push the difficulties aside or bend them to suit his purpose, and accomplish something."

Mrs. Dabney, listening to this, found nothing in it to quarrel with—yet somehow remained, if not skeptical, then passively unconvinced. " What are your plans ? " she asked him.

" Oh, it 's too soon to formulate anything," he told her, with prepared readiness. " It is n't a thing to rush into in a hurry, with half baked theories and limited information. Great results, permanent results, are never obtained that way."

" I hope it is n't any Peabody model-dwelling thing."

" Oh, nothing like it in the least," he assured her, and made a mental note to find out what it was she had referred to.

"The Lord-Rowton houses are better, they say," she went on, "but it seems to me that the real thing is that there should n't be all this immense number of people with only fourpence or fivepence in their pocket. That 's where the real mischief lies."

He nodded comprehendingly, but hesitated over further words. Then something occurred to him. "Look here!" he said. "If you 're as keen about all this, are you game to give up this footling old shop, and devote your time to carrying out my plans, when I 've licked 'em into shape?"

She began shaking her head, but then something seemed also to occur to her. "It 'll be time enough to settle that when we get to it, won't it?" she observed.

"No—you 've got to promise me now," he told her.

"Well that I won't!" she answered, roundly.

"You 'd see the whole—the whole scheme come to nothing, would you?"—he scolded at her—"rather than abate a jot of your confounded mulishness."

"Aha!" she commented, with a certain alertness of perception shining through the solidity of her mien. "I knew you were humbugging! If you 'd meant what you said, you would n't talk about its coming to nothing because I won't do this or that. I ought to have known better. I 'm always a goose when I believe what you tell me."

A certain abstract justice in her reproach impressed him. "No you 're not, Lou," he replied, coaxingly. "I really mean it all—every word of it—and more. It only occurred to me that it would all go better, if you helped. Can't you understand how I should feel that?"

She seemed in a grudging way to accept anew his professions of sincerity, but she resisted all attempts to extract any promise. "I don't believe in crossing a bridge till I get to it," she declared, when, on the point of his

departure, he last raised the question, and it had to be left at that.

He took with him some small books she had tied in a parcel, and told him to read. She had spoken so confidently of their illuminating value, that he found himself quite committed to their perusal—and almost to their endorsement. He had thought during the day of running down to Newmarket, for the Cesarewitch was to be run on the morrow, and someone had told him that that was worth seeing. By the time he reached his hotel, however, an entirely new project had possessed his mind. He packed his bag, and took the next train for home.

CHAPTER XXV

"I DID n't ask your father, after all," was one of the things that Thorpe said to his wife next day. He had the manner of one announcing a concession, albeit in an affable spirit, and she received the remark with a scant, silent nod.

Two days later he recurred to the subject. They were again upon the terrace, where he had been lounging in an easy-chair most of the day, with the books his sister had bid him read on a table beside him. He had glanced through some of them in a desultory fashion, cutting pages at random here and there, but for the most part he had looked straight before him at the broad landscape, mellowing now into soft browns and yellows under the mild, vague October sun. He had not thought much of the books, but he had a certain new sense of enjoyment in the fruits of this placid, abstracted rumination which perhaps they had helped to induce.

"About your father," he said now, as his wife, who had come out to speak with him on some other matter, was turning to go away again: "I 'm afraid I annoyed you the other day by what I said."

"I have no recollection of it," she told him, with tranquil politeness, over her shoulder.

He found himself all at once keenly desirous of a conversation on this topic. "But I *want* you to recollect," he said, as he rose to his feet. There was a suggestion of urgency in his tone which arrested her attention. She

moved slowly toward the chair, and after a little perched herself upon one of its big arms, and looked up at him where he leant against the parapet.

"I 've thought of it a good deal," he went on, in halting explanation. His purpose seemed clearer to him than were the right phrases in which to define it. "I persisted in saying that I 'd do something you did n't want me to do—something that was a good deal more your affair than mine—and I 've blamed myself for it. That is n't at all what I want to do."

Her face as well as her silence showed her to be at a loss for an appropriate comment. She was plainly surprised, and seemingly embarrassed as well.

"I 'm sure you always wish to be nice," she said at last. The words and tone were alike gracious, but he detected in them somewhere a perfunctory note.

"Oh—nice!" he echoed, in a sudden stress of impatience with the word. "Damn being 'nice'! Anybody can be 'nice.' I 'm thinking of something ten thousand times bigger than being 'nice.'"

"I withdraw the word immediately—unreservedly," she put in, with a smile in which he read that genial mockery he knew so well.

"You laugh at me—whenever I try to talk seriously," he objected.

"I laugh?" she queried, with an upward glance of demurely simulated amazement. "Impossible! I assure you I 've forgotten how."

"Ah, now we get to it!" he broke out, with energy. "You 're really feeling about it just as I am. You 're not satisfied with what we 're doing—with the life we 're leading—any more than I am. I see that, plain enough, now. I did n't dream of it before. Somehow I got the idea that you were enjoying it immensely—the greenhouses and

gardens and all that sort of thing. And do you know who it was that put me right—that told me you hated it?"

"Oh, don't let us talk of *him!*" Edith exclaimed, swiftly.

Thorpe laughed. "You 're wrong. It was n't your father. I did n't see him. No—it was my sister. She 's never seen you, but all the same she knew enough to give me points. She told me I was a fool to suppose you were happy here."

"How clever of her!" A certain bantering smile accompanied the words, but on the instant it faded away. She went on with a musing gravity. "I 'm sorry I don't get to know your sister. She seems an extremely real sort of person. I can understand that she might be difficult to live with—I daresay all genuine characters are—but she 's very real. Although, apparently, conversation is n't her strong point, still I enjoy talking with her."

"How do you mean?" Thorpe asked, knitting his brows in puzzlement.

"Oh, I often go to her shop—or did when I was in town. I went almost immediately after our—our return to England. I was half afraid she would recognize me—the portraits in the papers, you know—but apparently she did n't. And it 's splendid—the way she says absolutely nothing more than it 's necessary to say. And her candour! If she thinks books are bad she says so. Fancy that!"

He still frowned uneasily as he looked down at her. "You never mentioned to me that you had gone there," he told her, as if in reproach.

"Ah, it was complicated," Edith explained. "She objects to knowing me—I think secretly I respect her a great deal for that—and therefore there is something

clandestine about my getting to know her—and I could not be sure how it would impress you, and really it seemed simplest not to mention it."

"It is n't that alone," he declared, grave-faced still, but with a softer voice. "Do you remember what I said the other day? It would make all the difference in the world to me, if—if you were really—actually my other half!"

The phrase which he had caught at seemed, as it fell upon the air, to impregnate it with some benumbing quality. The husband and wife looked dumbly, almost vacantly at one another, for what appeared a long time.

"I mean"—all at once Thorpe found tongue, and even a sort of fluency as he progressed—"I mean, if you shared things really with me! Oh, I 'm not complaining; you must n't think that. The agreement we made at the start—you 've kept your part of it perfectly. You 've done better than that: you 've kept still about the fact that it made you unhappy."

"Oh no," she interposed, gently. "It is not the fact that it has made me unhappy."

"Well—discontented, then," he resumed, without pause. "Here we are. We do the thing we want to do—we make the kind of home for ourselves that we 've agreed we would like—and then it turns out that somehow it does n't come up to expectations. You get tired of it. I suppose, if the truth were known, I 'm by way of being tired of it too. Well, if you look at it, that fact is the most important thing in the world for both of us. It 's the one thing that we ought to be most anxious to discuss, and examine frankly in all its bearings—in order to see if we can't better it—but that 's precisely the thing that does n't get talked about between us. You would never have told me that you were unhappy——"

"You use the word again," she reminded him, a wan smile softening her protest.

Thorpe stood up, and took a slow step toward the chair. He held her glance with his own, as he stood then, his head bent, gravely regarding her.

"Do you tell me that you are happy?" he asked, with sober directness.

She fluttered her hands in a little restrained gesture of comment. "You consider only the extremes," she told him. "Between black and white there are so many colours and shades and half-tones! The whole spectrum, in fact. Hardly anybody, I should think, gets over the edge into the true black or the true white. There are always tints, modifications. People are always inside the colour-scheme, so to speak. The worst that can be said of me is that I may be in the blues—in the light-blues—but it is fair to remember that they photograph white."

Though there was an impulse within him to resent this as trifling, he resisted it, and judicially considered her allegory. "That is to say"—he began hesitatingly.

"To the observer I am happy. To myself I am not unhappy."

"Why won't you tell me, Edith, just where you are?"

The sound of her name was somewhat unfamiliar to their discourse. The intonation which his voice gave to it now caused her to look up quickly.

"If I could tell myself," she answered him, after an instant's thought, "pray believe that I would tell you."

The way seemed for the moment blocked before him, and he sighed heavily. "I want to get nearer to you," he said, with gloom, "and I don't!"

It occurred to her to remark: "You take exception to my phraseology when I say you always try to be 'nice,' but I 'm sure you know what I mean." She offered him

this assurance with a tentative smile, into which he gazed moodily.

"You did n't think I was 'nice' when you consented to marry me," he was suddenly inspired to say. "I can't imagine your applying that word to me then in your mind. God knows what it was you did say to yourself about me, but you never said I was 'nice.' That was the last word that would have fitted me then—and now it 's the only one you can think of." The hint that somehow he had stumbled upon a clue to the mysteries enveloping him rose to prominence in his mind as he spoke. The year had wrought a baffling difference in him. He lacked something now that then he had possessed, but he was powerless to define it.

He seated himself again in the chair, and put his hand through her arm to keep her where she lightly rested beside him. "Will you tell me," he said, with a kind of sombre gentleness, "what the word is that you would have used then? I know you would n't—could n't—have called me 'nice.' What would you have called me?"

She paused in silence for a little, then slipped from the chair and stood erect, still leaving her wrist within the restraining curve of his fingers. "I suppose," she said, musingly—"I suppose I should have said 'powerful' or 'strong.'" Then she released her arm, and in turn moved to the parapet.

"And I am weak now—I am 'nice,'" he reflected, mechanically.

In the profile he saw, as she looked away at the vast distant horizon, there was something pensive, even sad. She did not speak at once, and as he gazed at her more narrowly it seemed as if her lips were quivering. A new sense of her great beauty came to him—and with it a hint

that for the instant at least her guard was down. He sprang to his feet, and stood beside her.

"You *are* going to be open with me—Edith!" he pleaded, softly.

She turned from him a little, as if to hide the signs of her agitation. "Oh, what is there to say?" she demanded, in a tone which was almost a wail. "It is not your fault. I 'm not blaming you."

"*What* is not my fault?" he persisted with patient gentleness.

Suddenly she confronted him. There were the traces of tears upon her lashes, and serenity had fled from her face. "It is a mistake—a blunder," she began, hurriedly. "I take it all upon my own shoulders. I was the one who did it. I should have had more judgment—more good sense!"

"You are not telling me, are you," he asked with gravity, "that you are sorry you married me?"

"Is either of us glad?" she retorted, breathlessly. "What is there to be glad about? You are bored to death—you confess it. And I—well, it is not what I thought it would be. I deceived myself. I do not reproach you."

"No, you keep saying that," he observed, with gloomy slowness of utterance. "But what is it you reproach yourself with, then? We might as well have it out."

"Yes," she assented, with a swift reversion to calm. Her eyes met his with a glance which had in it an implacable frankness. "I married one man because he would be able to make me a Duchess. I married another because he had eighty thousand a year. That is the kind of beast I am. There is bad blood in me. You know my father; that is quite enough. I am his daughter; that explains everything."

The exaggeration of her tone and words produced a curious effect upon him. He stared at her for a little, perceiving slowly that a new personage was being revealed to him. The mask of delicately-balanced cynicism, of amiably polite indifference, had been lifted ; there was a woman of flesh and blood beneath it, after all—a woman to whom he could talk on terms of intimacy.

" Rubbish ! " he said, and his big face lightened into a genial, paternal smile. " You did n't marry me for my money at all ! What nonsense ! I simply came along and carried you off. You could n't help yourself. It would have been the same if I had n't had sixpence."

To his sharp scrutiny there seemed to flicker in her eyes a kind of answering gleam. Then she hastily averted her glance, and in this action too there was a warrant for his mounting confidence.

" The trouble has been," he declared, " that I 've been too much afraid of you. I 've thought that you were made of so much finer stuff than I am, that you must n't be touched. That was all a mistake. I see it right enough now. You *are* finer than I am—God knows there 's no dispute about that—but that 's no reason why I should have hung up signs of ' Hands off ! ' all around you, and been frightened by them myself. I had the cheek to capture you and carry you off—and I ought to have had the pluck to make you love me afterward, and keep it up. And that 's what I 'm going to do ! "

To this declaration she offered no immediate reply, but continued to gaze with a vaguely meditative air upon the expanse of landscape spread below them. He threw a hasty glance over the windows behind him, and then with assurance passed his arm round her waist. He could not say that there was any responsive yielding to his embrace, but he did affirm to himself with new conviction, as he

looked down upon the fair small head at his shoulder, with its lovely pale-brown hair drawn softly over the temples, and its glimpse of the matchless profile inclined beneath—that it was all right.

He waited for a long time, with a joyous patience, for her to speak. The mere fact that she stood beneath his engirdling arm, and gave no thought to the potential servants'-eyes behind them, was enough for present happiness. He regarded the illimitable picture commanded from his terrace with refreshed eyes; it was once again the finest view in England—and something much more than that beside.

At last, abruptly, she laughed aloud—a silvery, amused little laugh under her breath. "How comedy and tragedy tread forever on each other's heels!" she remarked. Her tone was philosophically gay, but upon reflection he did not wholly like her words.

"There was n't any tragedy," he said, "and there is n't any comedy."

She laughed again. "Oh, don't say that this does n't appeal to your sense of humour!" she urged, with mock fervour.

Thorpe sighed in such unaffected depression at this, that she seemed touched by his mood. Without stirring from his hold, she lifted her face. "Don't think I 'm hateful," she bade him, and her eyes were very kind. "There 's more truth in what you 've been saying than even you imagine. It really was n't the money—or I mean it might easily have been the same if there had been no money. But how shall I explain it? I am attracted by a big, bold, strong pirate, let us say, but as soon as he has carried me off—that is the phrase for it—then he straightway renounces crime and becomes a law-abiding, peaceful citizen. My buccaneer transforms him-

self, under my very eyes, into an alderman ! Do you say there is no comedy in that—and tragedy too ? ''

'' Oh, put it that way and it 's all right,'' he declared, after a moment's consideration. '' I 've got as much fun in me as anybody else,'' he went on, '' only your jokes have a way of raising blisters on me, somehow. But that 's all done with now. That 's because I did n't know you—was frightened of you. But I aint scared any more. Everything is different ! ''

With a certain graciousness of lingering movement, she withdrew herself from his clasp, and faced him with a doubtful smile. '' Ah, don't be too sure,'' she murmured.

'' Everything *is* different ! '' he repeated, with confident emphasis. '' Don't you see yourself it is ? ''

'' You say it is,'' she replied, hesitatingly, '' but that alone does n't make it so. The assertion that life is n't empty does n't fill it.''

'' Ah, but *now* you will talk with me about all that,'' he broke in triumphantly. '' We 've been standing off with one another. We 've been of no help to each other. But we 'll change that, now. We 'll talk over everything together. We 'll make up our minds exactly what we want to do, and then I 'll tuck you under my arm and we 'll set out and do it.''

She smiled with kindly tolerance for his new-born enthusiasm. '' Don't count on me for too much wisdom or invention,'' she warned him. '' If things are to be done, you are still the one who will have to do them. But undoubtedly you are at your best when you are doing things. This really has been no sort of life for you, here.''

He gathered her arm into his. '' Come and show me your greenhouses,'' he said, and began walking toward the end of the terrace. '' It 'll turn out to have been all right for me, this year that I 've spent here,'' he con-

tinued, as they strolled along. There was a delightful consciousness of new intimacy conveyed by the very touch of her arm, which filled his tone with buoyancy. "I 've been learning all sorts of tricks here, and getting myself into your ways of life. It 's all been good training. In every way I 'm a better man than I was."

They had descended from the terrace to a garden path, and approached now a long glass structure, through the panes of which masses of soft colour—whites, yellows, pinks, mauves, and strange dull reds—were dimly perceptible.

"The chrysanthemums are not up to much this year," Edith observed, as they drew near to the door of this house. "Collins did them very badly—as he did most other things. But next year it will be very different. Gafferson is the best chrysanthemum man in England. That is he in there now, I think."

Thorpe stopped short, and stared at her, the while the suggestions stirred by the sound of this name slowly shaped themselves.

"Gafferson?" he asked her, with a blank countenance.

"My new head-gardener," she explained. "He was at Hadlow, and after poor old Lady Plowden died—why, surely you remember him there. You spoke about him—you 'd known him somewhere—in the West Indies, was n't it?"

He looked into vacancy with the aspect of one stupefied. "Did I?" he mumbled automatically.

Then, with sudden decision, he swung round on the gravel. "I 've got a kind of headache coming on," he said. "If you don't mind, we won't go inside among the flowers."

CHAPTER XXVI

THORPE walked along, in the remoter out-of-the-way parts of the great gardens, as the first shadows of evening began to dull the daylight. For a long time he moved aimlessly about, sick at heart and benumbed of mind, in the stupid oppression of a bad dream.

There ran through all his confused thoughts the exasperating consciousness that it was nonsense to be frightened, or even disturbed; that, in truth, nothing whatever had happened. But he could not lay hold of it to any comforting purpose. Some perverse force within him insisted on raising new phantoms in his path, and directing his reluctant gaze to their unpleasant shapes. Forgotten terrors pushed themselves upon his recollection. It was as if he stood again in the Board Room, with the telegram telling of old Tavender's death in his hands, waiting to hear the knock of Scotland Yard upon the door.

The coming of Gafferson took on a kind of supernatural aspect, when Thorpe recalled its circumstances. His own curious mental ferment, which had made this present week a period apart in his life, had begun in the very hour of this man's approach to the house. His memory reconstructed a vivid picture of that approach—of the old ramshackle village trap, and the boy and the bags and the yellow tin trunk, and that decent, red-bearded, plebeian figure, so commonplace and yet so elusively suggestive of something out of the ordinary. It seemed to him now that he had at the time discerned a certain fateful quality

in the apparition. And he and his wife had actually been talking of old Kervick at the moment ! It was their disagreement over him which had prevented her explaining about the new head-gardener. There was an effect of the uncanny in all this.

And what did Gafferson want ? How much did he know ? The idea that perhaps old Kervick had found him out, and patched up with him a scheme of blackmail, occurred to him, and in the unreal atmosphere of his mood, became a thing of substance. With blackmail, however, one could always deal ; it was almost a relief to see the complication assume that guise. But if Gafferson was intent upon revenge and exposure instead ? With such a slug-like, patient, tenacious fool, was that not more likely ?

Reasonable arguments presented themselves to his mind over and again : his wife had known of Gafferson's work, and thought highly of it, and had been in a position to learn of his leaving Hadlow. What more natural than that she should hasten to employ him ? And what was it, after all, that Gafferson could possibly know or prove ? His brother-in-law had gone off, and got too drunk to live, and had died. What in the name of all that was sensible had this to do with Thorpe ? Why should it even be supposed that Gafferson associated Thorpe with any phase of the business ? And if he had any notion of a hostile movement, why should he have delayed action so long ? Why indeed !

Reassurance did not come to him, but at last an impulse to definite action turned his footsteps toward the cluster of greenhouses in the deepening shadow of the mansion. He would find Gafferson, and probe this business to the uttermost. If there was discoverable in the man's manner or glance the least evidence of a malevolent

intention—he would know what to do. Ah, what was it that he would do? He could not say, beyond that it would be bad for Gafferson. He instinctively clenched the fists in the pockets of his jacket as he quickened his pace.

Inside the congeries of glazed houses he was somewhat at sea. It was still light enough to make one's way about in the passages between the stagings, but he had no idea of the general plan of the buildings, and it seemed to him that he frequently got back to places he had traversed before. There were two or three subordinate gardeners in or about the houses, but upon reflection he forbore to question them. He tried to assume an idly indifferent air as he sauntered past, nodding almost imperceptible acknowledgment of the forefingers they jerked upward in salutation.

He came at last upon a locked door, the key of which had been removed. The fact vaguely surprised him, and he looked with awakened interest through the panes of this door. The air inside seemed slightly thickened—and then his eye caught the flicker of a flame, straight ahead. It was nothing but the fumigation of a house; the burning spirits in the lamp underneath the brazier were filling the structure with vapours fatal to all insect life. In two or three hours the men would come and open the doors and windows and ventilate the place. The operation was quite familiar to him; it had indeed interested him more when he first saw it done than had anything else connected with the greenhouses.

His abstracted gaze happened to take note of the fact that the door-key was hanging on a nail overhead, and then suddenly this seemed to be related to something else in his thoughts—some obscure impression or memory which evaded him. Continuing to look at the key, a cer-

tain recollection all at once assumed great definiteness in his mind : it came to him that the labels on this patent fumigator they were using warned people against exposing themselves to its fumes more than was absolutely necessary. That meant, of course, that their full force would kill a human being. It was very interesting. He looked through the glass again, but could not see that the air was any thicker. The lamp still burned brightly.

He turned away, and beheld a man, in an old cap and apron, at the further end of the palm-house he was in, doing something to a plant. Thorpe noted the fact that he felt no surprise in seeing that it was Gafferson. Somehow the sight of the key, and of the poison-spreading flame inside the locked door, seemed to have prepared him for the spectacle of Gafferson close at hand. He moved forward slowly toward the head-gardener, and luminous plans rose in his mind, ready-made at each step. He could strangle this annoying fool, or smother him, into non-resisting insensibility, and then put him inside that death-house, and let it be supposed that he had been asphyxiated by accident. The men when they came back would find him there. But ah ! they would know that they had not left him there ; they would have seen him outside, no doubt, after the fire had been lighted. Well, the key could be left in the unlocked door. Then it could be supposed that he had rashly entered, and been overcome by the vapours. He approached the man silently, his brain arranging the details of the deed with calm celerity.

Then some objections to the plan rose up before him : they dealt almost exclusively with the social nuisance the thing would entail. There was to be a house-party, with that Duke and Duchess in it, of whom his wife talked so much, and it would be a miserable kind of bore to have

a suffocated gardener forced upon them as a principal topic of conversation. Of course, too, it would more or less throw the whole household into confusion. And its effect upon his wife !—the progress of his thoughts was checked abruptly by this suggestion. A vision of the shock such a catastrophe might involve to her—or at the best, of the gross unpleasantness she would find in it—flashed over his mind, and then yielded to a softening, radiant consciousness of how much this meant to him. It seemed to efface everything else upon the instant. A profoundly tender desire for her happiness was in complete possession. Already the notion of doing anything to wound or grieve her appeared incredible to him.

" Well, Gafferson," he heard himself saying, in one of the more reserved tones of his patriarchal manner. He had halted close to the inattentive man, and stood looking down upon him. His glance was at once tolerant and watchful.

Gafferson slowly rose from his slouching posture, surveyed the other while his faculties in leisurely fashion worked out the problem of recognition, and then raised his finger to his cap-brim. " Good-evening, sir," he said.

This gesture of deference was eloquently convincing. Thorpe, after an instant's alert scrutiny, smiled upon him. " I was glad to hear that you had come to us," he said with benevolent affability. " We shall expect great things of a man of your reputation."

" It 'll be a fair comfort, sir," the other replied, " to be in a place where what one does is appreciated. What use is it to succeed in hybridizing a Hippeastrum procera with a Pancratium Amancæs, after over six hundred attempts in ten years, and then spend three years a-hand-nursing the seedlings, and then your master won't take

enough interest in the thing to pay your fare up to London to the exhibition with 'em? That 's what 'ud break any man's heart."

"Quite true," Thorpe assented, with patrician kindliness. "You need fear nothing of that sort here, Gafferson. We give you a free hand. Whatever you want, you have only to let us know. And you can't do things too well to please us."

"Thank you, sir," said Gafferson, and really, as Thorpe thought about it, the interview seemed at an end.

The master turned upon his heel, with a brief, oblique nod over his shoulder, and made his way out into the open air. Here, as he walked, he drew a succession of long consolatory breaths. It was almost as if he had emerged from the lethal presence of the fumigator itself. He took the largest cigar from his case, lighted it, and sighed smoke-laden new relief as he strolled back toward the terrace.

But a few minutes before he had been struggling helplessly in the coils of an evil nightmare. These terrors seemed infinitely far behind him now. He gave an indifferent parting glance backward at them, as one might over his after-breakfast cigar at the confused alarms of an early awakening hours before. There was nothing worth remembering—only the shapeless and foolish burden of a bad dream.

The assurance rose within him that he was not to have any more such trouble. With a singular clearness of mental vision he perceived that the part of him which brought bad dreams had been sloughed off, like a serpent's skin. There had been two Thorpes, and one of them—the Thorpe who had always been willing to profit by knavery, and at last in a splendid *coup* as a master thief had stolen nearly a million, and would have shrunk not at

all from adding murder to the rest, to protect that plunder —this vicious Thorpe had gone away altogether. There was no longer a place for him in life ; he would never be seen again by mortal eye. . . . There remained only the good Thorpe, the pleasant, well-intentioned opulent gentleman ; the excellent citizen ; the beneficent master, to whom, even Gafferson like the others, touched a respectful forelock.

It passed in the procession of his reverie as a kind of triumph of virtue that the good Thorpe retained the fortune which the bad Thorpe had stolen. It was in all senses a fortunate fact, because now it would be put to worthy uses. Considering that he had but dimly drifted about heretofore on the outskirts of the altruistic impulse, it was surprisingly plain to him now that he intended to be a philanthropist. Even as he mentioned the word to himself, the possibilities suggested by it expanded in his thoughts. His old dormant, formless lust for power stirred again in his pulses. What other phase of power carried with it such rewards, such gratitudes, such humble subservience on all sides as far as the eye could reach—as that exercised by the intelligently munificent philanthropist ?

Intelligence ! that was the note of it all. Many rich people dabbled at the giving of money, but they did it so stupidly, in such a slip-shod fashion, that they got no credit for it. Even millionaires more or less in public life, great newspaper-owners, great brewer-peers, and the like, men who should know how to do things well, gave huge sums in bulk for public charities, such as the housing of the poor, and yet contrived somehow to let the *kudos* that should have been theirs evaporate. He would make no such mistake as that.

It was easy enough to see wherein they erred. They

gave superciliously, handing down their alms from a top-lofty altitude of Tory superiority, and the Radicals down below sniffed or growled even while they grudgingly took these gifts—that was all nonsense. These aristocratic or tuft-hunting philanthropists were the veriest duffers. They laid out millions of pounds in the vain attempt to secure what might easily be had for mere thousands, if they went sensibly to work. Their vast benefactions yielded them at the most bare thanks, or more often no thanks at all, because they lacked the wit to lay aside certain little trivial but annoying pretensions, and waive a few empty prejudices. They went on, year after year, tossing their fortunes into a sink of contemptuous ingratitude, wondering feebly why they were not beloved in return. It was because they were fools. They could not, or they would not, understand the people they sought to manipulate.

What could not a man of real brain, of real breadth and energy and force of character, do in London with two hundred thousand pounds? Why, he could make himself master of the town! He could break into fragments the political ascendency of the snob, "semi-detached" villa classes, in half the Parliamentary divisions they now controlled. He could reverse the partisan complexion of the Metropolitan delegation, and lead to Westminster a party of his own, a solid phalanx of disciplined men, standing for the implacable Democracy of reawakened London. With such a backing, he could coerce ministries at will, and remake the politics of England. The *rôle* of Great Oliver himself was not too hopelessly beyond the scope of such a vision.

Thorpe threw his cigar-end aside, and then noted that it was almost dark. He strode up to the terrace two steps at a time, and swung along its length with a vigour and

exhilaration of movement he had not known, it seemed to him, for years. He felt the excitement of a new incentive bubbling in his veins.

"Her Ladyship is in her sitting-room, sir," a domestic replied to his enquiry in the hall. The title arrested his attention from some fresh point of view, and he pondered it, as he made his way along the corridor, and knocked at a door. At the sound of a voice he pushed open the door, and went in.

Lady Cressage, looking up, noted, with aroused interest, a marked change in his carriage. He stood aggressively erect, his big shoulders squared, and his head held high. On his massive face there was the smile, at once buoyant and contained, of a strong man satisfied with himself.

Something impelled her to rise, and to put a certain wistfulness of enquiry into her answering smile.

"Your headache is better then?" she asked him.

He looked puzzled for a moment, then laughed lightly. "Oh—yes," he answered. Advancing, he caught her suddenly, almost vehemently, in his arms, and covered the face that was perforce upturned with kisses.

When she was released from this overwhelming embrace, and stood panting and flushed, regarding him with narrowed, intent eyes, in which mystification was mellowed by the gleam of not-displeased curiosity, he preferred a request which completed her bewilderment.

"Mrs. Thorpe," he began, with significant deliberation, but smiling with his eyes to show the tenderness underlying his words—"would you mind if we did n't dress for dinner this evening, and if we dined in the little breakfast-room—or here, for that matter—instead of the big place?"

"Why, not at all, if you wish it," she answered readily enough, but viewing him still with a puzzled glance.

" I 'm full of new ideas," he explained, impulsively impatient of the necessity to arrange a sequence among his thoughts. " I see great things ahead. It 's all come to me in a minute, but I could n't see it clearer if I 'd thought it out for a year. Perhaps I was thinking of it all the time and did n't know it. But anyhow, I see my way straight ahead. You don't know what it means to me to have something to do. It makes another man of me, just to think about it. Another man ?—yes, twenty men ! It 's a thing that can be done, and by God ! I 'm going to do it ! "

She beheld in his face, as she scrutinized it, a stormy glow of the man's native, coarse, imperious virility, reasserting itself through the mask of torpor which this vacuous year had superimposed. The large features were somehow grown larger still ; they dominated the countenance as rough bold headlands dominate a shore. It was the visage of a conqueror—of a man gathering within himself, to expend upon his fellows, the appetites, energies, insensibilities, audacities of a beast of prey. Her glance fluttered a little, and almost quailed, before the frank barbarism of power in the look he bent upon her. Then it came to her that something more was to be read in this look; there was in it a reservation of magnanimity, of protection, of entreating invitation, for her special self. He might tear down with his claws, and pull to pieces and devour others ; but his mate he would shelter and defend and love with all his strength. An involuntary trembling thrill ran through her—and then she smiled up at him.

" What is it you 're going to do ? " she asked him, mechanically. Her mind roved far afield.

" Rule England ! " he told her with gravity.

For the moment there seemed to her nothing positively

incongruous in the statement. To look at him, as he loomed before her, uplifted by his refreshed and soaring self-confidence, it appeared not easy to say what would be impossible to him.

She laughed, after a fleeting pause, with a plainer note of good-fellowship than he had ever heard in her voice before. "Delightful," she said gayly. "But I 'm not sure that I quite understand the—the precise connection of morning-dress and dinner in a small room with the project."

He nodded pleased comprehension of the spirit in which she took him. "Just a whim," he explained. "The things I 've got in mind don't fit at all with ceremony, and that big barn of a room, and men standing about. What I want more than anything else is a quiet snug little evening with you alone, where I can talk to you and —and we can be together by ourselves. You 'd like it, would n't you?"

She hesitated, and there was a novel confession of embarrassment in her mantling colour and down-spread lashes. It had always to his eyes been, from the moment he first beheld it, the most beautiful face in the world—exquisitely matchless in its form and delicacy of line and serene yet sensitive grace. But he had not seen in it before, or guessed that there could come to it, this crowning added loveliness of feminine confusion.

"You would like it, would n't you?" he repeated in a lower, more strenuous tone.

She lifted her eyes slowly, and looked, not into his, but over his shoulder, as in a reverie, half meditation, half languorous dreaming. She swayed rather than stepped toward him.

"I think," she answered, in a musing murmur,—"I think I shall like—everything."

CHAPTER XXVII

THORPE found the Duke of Glastonbury a much more interesting person to watch and to talk with, both during the dinner Saturday evening and later, than he had anticipated.

He was young, and slight of frame, and not at all imposing in stature, but he bore himself with a certain shy courtliness of carriage which had a distinction of its own. His face, with its little black moustache and large dark eyes, was fine upon examination, but in some elusively foreign way. There lingered a foreign note, too, in the way he talked. His speech was English enough to the ear, it was true, but it was the considered English of a book, and its phrases had a deftness which was hardly native. He looked, if not a sad young man, then one conscious always of sufficient reasons for sadness, but one came, after a time, to see that the mood beneath was not melancholy. It had even its sprightly side, which shone out irregularly in his glance and talk, from a sober mean of amiable weariness.

Thorpe knew his extraordinary story—that of a poor tutor, earning his living in ignorance of the fact that he had a birthright of any sort, who had been miraculously translated into the heir, not only to an ancient title but to vast collateral wealth. He had been born and reared in France, and it was there that the heralds of this stupendous change in his affairs had found him out. There was

a good deal more to the story, including numerous unsavoury legends about people now many years dead, and it was impossible to observe the young Duke and not seem to perceive signs that he was still nervously conscious of these legends. The story of his wife—a serene, grey-eyed, rather silent young person, with a pale face of some beauty, and with much purity and intellect—was strange enough to match. She also had earned her own living, as a private secretary or type-writing girl, or something of the sort, and her husband had deliberately chosen her after he had come into his title. One might study her very closely, however, and catch no hint that these facts in any degree disconcerted her.

Thorpe studied her a good deal, in a furtive way, with a curiosity born of his knowledge that the Duke had preferred her, when he might have married his widowed cousin, who was now Thorpe's own wife. How he had come to know this, he could never have told. He had breathed it in, somehow, with the gossip-laden atmosphere of that one London season of his. It was patent enough, too, that his wife—his Edith—had not only liked this ducal youngster very much, but still entertained toward him a considerable affection. She had never dissembled this feeling, and it visibly informed her glance and manner now, at her own table, when she turned to speak with him, where he sat at her right hand. Thorpe had never dreamed of thinking ill of his wife's friendship, even when her indifference to what he thought had been most taken for granted. Now that this was all changed, and the amazing new glory of a lover had enveloped him, he had a distinct delight in watching the myriad charming phases of her kind manner, half-sisterly, half-motherly, toward the grave-faced young man. It was all a part of the delicious change which these past few days had wrought in

her, this warm and supple softness of mien, of eye and smile and voice.

But how the Duke, if really he had had a chance to marry Edith, could have taken the type-writer instead, baffled speculation. Thorpe gave more attention to this problem, during dinner, than he did to the conversation of the table. His exchange of sporadic remarks with the young Duchess beside him was indeed an openly perfunctory affair, which left him abundant leisure to contemplate her profile in silence, while she turned to listen to the general talk, of which Miss Madden and the Hon. Winifred Plowden bore the chief burden. The talk of these ladies interested him but indifferently, though the frequent laughter suggested that it was amusing. He looked from his wife to the Duchess and back again, in ever-recurring surprise that the coronet had been carried past Edith. And once he looked a long time at his wife and the Duke, and formulated the theory that she must have refused him. No doubt that was why she had been sympathetically fond of him ever since, and was being so nice to him now. Yes—clearly that was it. He felt upon this that he also liked the Duke very much.

It was by no means so apparent that the Duke liked him. Both he and his Duchess, indeed, were scrupulously and even deferentially polite, but there was a painstaking effect about it, which, seemingly, they lacked the art altogether to conceal. It seemed to Thorpe that the other guests unconsciously took their cue from this august couple, and all exposed somewhat the effort their civility to him involved. At another time the suspicion of this would have stung him. He had only to glance across the table to where his wife sat now, and it was all right. What other people thought of him—how other people liked or disliked him—was of no earthly importance.

Whenever he chose to exert himself, he could compel from them the behaviour that he desired. It was their dull inability to read character which prompted them to regard him as merely a rich outsider who had married Edith Cressage. He viewed with a comfortable tolerance this infirmity of theirs. When the time came, if he wanted to do so, he could awaken them to their delusion as by forked lightning and the burst of thunder.

The whim came to him, and expanded swiftly into a determination, to contrive some intimate talk forthwith with the Duke. The young man seemed both clever and sensible, and in a way impressionable as well. Thorpe thought that he would probably have some interesting things to say, but still more he thought of him as a likely listener. It would be the easier to detach him from the company, since the occasion was one of studied informality. The Duke did not go about in society, in the ordinary sense of the word, and he would not have come to High Thorpe to meet a large party. He was here as a kinsman and friend of his hostess for a quiet week ; and the few other guests fitted readily enough into the picture of a family gathering. The spirit of domesticity had indeed so obviously descended upon the little group in the drawing-room, an hour or so after dinner, that Thorpe felt it quite the natural thing to put his arm through that of the Duke and lead him off to his personal smoking-room. He even published his intention by audibly bidding the Hon. Balder Plowden to remain with the ladies.

When the two had seated themselves in soft, low easy-chairs, and the host had noted with pleasure that his guest had no effeminate qualms in the matter of large rich cigars, a brief silence ensued.

"I am very anxious to get your views on a certain subject," Thorpe was inspired to begin, bluntly pushing

preliminaries aside. "If a man of fortune wishes to do genuine good with his money, here in England, how should he best go about it?"

The Duke looked up at his questioner, with a sudden flash of surprise on his dark, mobile face. He hesitated a moment, and smiled a little. "You ask of me the sum of human wisdom," he said. "It is the hardest of all problems; no one solves it."

Thorpe nodded his big head comprehendingly. "That's all the more reason why it ought to be solved," he declared, with slow emphasis.

The other expressed by look and tone an augmented consciousness of the unexpected. "I did not know," he remarked cautiously, "that this was a matter in which you were specially concerned. It pleases me very much to hear it. Even if the solution does not come, it is well to have as many as possible turning the problem over in their minds."

"Oh, but I 'm going to solve it!" Thorpe told him, with round confidence.

The Duke pulled contemplatively at his cigar for a little. "Do not think me a cynic," he began at last. "You are a man of affairs; you have made your own way; you should be even more free from illusions than I am. If you tell me that these good things can be done, I am the last one to dispute you. But I have seen near at hand experiments of exceptional importance, on a very grand scale, and the result does not encourage me. I come to doubt indeed if money has any such power in these affairs as we think it has—for that matter, if it has any power at all. The shifting of money can always disorganize what is going on at the moment—change it about and alter it in many ways—but its effect is only temporary. As soon as the pressure is released, the human atoms re-

arrange themselves as they were before, and the old conditions return. I think the only force which really makes any permanent difference is character—and yet about even that I am not sure. The best man I have ever known—and in many respects the ablest—devoted untold energy and labour, and much money, too, to the service of a few thousand people in Somerset, on land of his own, upon a theory wonderfully elaborated and worked out. Perhaps you have heard of Emanuel Torr and his colony, his System?"

Thorpe shook his head.

"He had worked tremendously for years at it. He fell ill and went away—and in a day all the results of his labours and outlay were flat on the ground. The property is mine now, and it is farmed and managed again in the ordinary way, and really the people there seem already to have forgotten that they had a prophet among them. The marvelous character of the man—you look in vain for any sign of an impress that it left upon them. I never go there. I cannot bear those people. I have sometimes the feeling that if it were feasible I should like to oppress them in some way—to hurt them."

"Oh! 'the people' are hogs, right enough," Thorpe commented genially, "but they *are* 'the people,' and they 're the only tools we 've got to work with to make the world go round."

"But if you leave the world alone," objected the Duke, "it goes round of itself. And if you don't leave it alone, it goes round just the same, without any reference whatever to your exertions. Some few men are always cleverer or noisier or more restless than the others, and their activity produces certain deviations and peculiarities in their generation. The record of these—generally a very faulty and foolish record—we call history. We say of

these movements in the past that some of them were good and some were bad. Our sons very likely will differ totally from us about which were good and which were bad ; quite possibly, in turn, their sons may agree with us. I do not see that it matters. We cannot treat anything as final—except that the world goes round. We appear out of the darkness at one edge of it ; we are carried across and pitched off into the darkness at the other edge of it. We are certain about nothing else."

" Except that some of us have to pay for our ride, and others don't," put in Thorpe. The tone in which he spoke made his meaning so clear that his Grace sat up.

" Ah, you think we do not pay ? " he queried, his countenance brightening with the animation of debate. " My dear sir, we pay more than anyone else. Our fares are graduated, just as our death-duties are. No doubt there are some idle and stupid, thick-skinned rich fellows, who escape the ticket-collector. But for each of them there are a thousand idle poor fellows who do the same. You, for example, are a man of large wealth. I, for my sins, carry upon my back the burden of a prodigious fortune. Could we not go out now, and walk down the road to your nearest village, and find in the pub. there a dozen day-labourers happier than we are ? Why—it is Saturday night. Then I will not say a dozen, but as many as the tap will hold. It is not the beer alone that makes them happy. Do not think that. It is the ability to rest untroubled, the sense that till Monday they have no more responsibility than a tree-toad. Does the coming of Sunday make that difference to you or to me ? When night comes, does it mean to us that we are to sleep off into oblivion all we have done that day, and begin life afresh next morning ? No-o ! We are the tired people ; the

load is never lifted from our backs. Ah, do we not pay indeed!"

"Oh-ho!" ejaculated Thorpe. He had been listening with growing astonishment to the other's confession. He was still surprised as he spoke, but a note of satisfaction mounted into his voice as he went on. "*You* are unhappy, too! You are a young man, in excellent health; you have the wife you want; you understand good tobacco; you have a son. That is a great deal—but my God! think what else you 've got. You 're the Duke of Glastonbury—one of the oldest titles in England. You 're one of the richest men in the country—the richest in the old peerage, at any rate, I 'm told. And *you 're* not happy!"

The other smiled. "Ah, the terms and forms survive," he said, with a kind of pedagogic affability, "after the substance has disappeared. The nobleman, the prince, was a great person in the times when he monopolized wealth. It enabled him to monopolize almost everything else that was pleasant or superb. He had the arts and the books and the musicians and the silks and velvets, and the bath-tubs—everything that made existence gorgeous—all to himself. He had war to amuse himself with, and the seven deadly sins. The barriers are down now. Everything which used to be exclusively the nobleman's is now within everybody's reach, including the sins. And it is not only that others have levelled up to him; they have levelled him down. He cannot dress now more expensively than other people. Gambling used to be recognized as one of his normal relaxations, but now, the higher his rank, the more sharply he is scolded for it. Naturally he does not know what to do with himself. As an institution, he descends from a period when the only imaginable use for wealth was to be magnificent with it.

But now in this business age, where the recognized use of wealth is to make more wealth, he is so much out of place that he has even forgotten how to be magnificent. There are some illustrated articles in one of the magazines, giving photographs of the great historic country-houses of England. You should see the pictures of the interiors. The furniture and decorations are precisely what a Brixton dressmaker would buy, if she suddenly came into some money."

"All the same," Thorpe stuck to his point, "you are not happy."

The Duke frowned faintly, as if at the other's persistency. Then he shrugged his shoulders and answered in a lighter tone. "It hardly amounts to that, I think. I confess that there are alleviations to my lot. In the opinion of the world I am one of its most fortunate citizens —and it is not for me to say that the world is altogether wrong. The chief point is—I don't know if you will quite follow me—there are limits to what position and fortune can give a man. And so easily they may deprive him of pleasures which poorer men enjoy! I may be wrong, but it seems impossible to me that any rich man who has acres of gardens and vineries and glass can get up the same affection for it all that the cottager will have for his little flower-plot, that he tends with his own hands. One seems outside the realities of life—a mere spectator at the show."

"Ah, but why not *do* things?" Thorpe demanded of him. "Why merely stand, as you say, and look on?"

The other leant his head back again. "Pray what do you recommend?" he asked almost listlessly.

"Why—politics, for example."

The Duke nodded, with an air of according to the suggestion a certain respect. "Unhappily I am too much of

a foreigner," he commented. "I know Englishmen and their affairs too imperfectly. Sometime—perhaps."

"And philanthropic work—you don't care about that," pursued the other.

"Oh—we go not so far as that," said his Grace, with a deprecatory wave of the hands. "My wife finds many interests in it, only she would not like to have you call it philanthropical. She is London-born, and it is a great pleasure to her to be of assistance to poorer young women in London, who have so little done for them by the community, and can do so little for themselves. I am much less skeptical about that particular work, I may tell you, than about philanthropy in general. In fact, I am quite clear that it is doing good. At least it is doing a kindness, and that is a pleasant occupation. We are really not so idle as one might think. We work at it a good deal, my wife and I."

"So am I London-born," Thorpe remarked, with a certain irrelevancy. After a moment's pause he turned a sharply enquiring glance upon his guest. "This thing that you 're doing in London—does it give you any 'pull' there?"

"Pull?" repeated the other helplessly.

"If there was something you wanted the people of London to do, would they do it for you because of what you 've been doing for them—or for their girls?"

The Duke looked puzzled for a moment. "But it is n't conceivable that I should want London to do anything—unless it might be to consume its own smoke," he observed.

"Quite so!" said Thorpe, rising bulkily to his feet, but signifying by a gesture that his companion was to remain seated. He puffed at his cigar till its tip gleamed angrily through the smoke about him, and moved a few steps with

his hands in his pockets. "That is what I wanted to get at. Now I 'm London-born, I 've got the town in my blood. The Thorpes have been booksellers there for generations. The old name is over the old shop still. I think I know what Londoners are like ; I ought to. It 's my belief that they don't want gifts. They 'll take 'em, but it is n't what they want. They 're a trading people —one of the oldest in the world. Commercial traditions, the merchant's pride—these are bred in their bones. They don't want something for nothing. They like an honest bargain—fair on both sides. 'You help me and I 'll help you.' And it 's the only way you can do anything worth doing."

"Well," said the Duke, passively.

Thorpe halted, and still with the cigar between his teeth, looked down at him.

"I can go into London, and study out the things that are to be done—that need to be done—and divide these into two parts, those that belong to private enterprise and those that ought to be done publicly. And I can say to Londoners—not in so many words, mind you, but in a way the sharper ones will understand : 'Here, you fellows. I 'll begin doing out of my own pocket one set of these things, and you in turn must put yourselves at my back, and stand by me, and put me in a position where I can make the Government do this other set of things.' That will appeal to them. A poor man could n't lead them any distance, because he could always be killed by the cry that he was filling his pockets. They will believe in a man whose ambition is to win an earldom and five thousand a year out of politics, but they will stone to death the man who merely tries to get a few hundreds a year out of it for his wife and children. And a man like you can't do anything in London, because they can't see

that there 's anything you want in return—and besides, in their hearts, they don't like your class. Don't forget it! This is the city that chopped off the king's head!"

"Ah, but this is also the city," retorted the other, with placid pleasure in his argument, "which decked itself in banners and ribbons to welcome back the son of that same king. And if you think of it, he was rather a quaint thing in sons, too."

"It was the women did that," Thorpe affirmed with readiness. "They get their own way once in a while, when the men are tired out, and they have their little spell of nonsense and monkey-shines, but it never lasts long. Charles II. does n't matter at all—but take my word for it, his father matters a great deal. There was a Thorpe among the judges who voted to behead him. I am descended in a straight line from him."

His Grace shrugged his slight shoulders again. "It happens that my ancestors had extremely large facilities for doing unpleasant things, and, God knows, they did them—but I don't quite see what that goes to prove, now."

"No, you don't grasp the idea," said Thorpe, resignedly. After a moment's pause he took the cigar from his lips, and straightened himself. "All the same," he declared roundly, "I am going to do the trick. London has been waiting for an organizer—a leader—for a hundred years. The right kind of a man, going the right way to work, can stand London on its head, as surely as I can burn this cigar. And I 'm going to have a try at it."

"It is very interesting," remarked the Duke, with vagueness. "But—are the ladies waiting for us? And if so, are n't we keeping them up unconscionably?"

As if in comment upon his words, there was the sound of a faint rap at the door. Then it opened, and through

the dense blue haze of the room they saw some shadowed forms softly indistinct save where the light from the ceiling outside shone down upon a group of coiffured heads. A noise of mingled coughing and laughter specifically completed the introduction.

"Oh, I 'm—it 's unendurable in there," spoke the voice of the hostess. "We *were* coming in to smoke with you," she called out through the cloud, "since you would n't stop with us."

"Come along!" answered Thorpe, cheerily. He strode to the end of the room and raised a window. From the same corner he turned on some added lights.

Under this more effective illumination, the lady of the house advanced, with Miss Madden and the Hon. Winifred close behind her. "Frank has gone to bed," she explained to the Duke, who had risen. Then she turned to her husband a bright-eyed glance: "You don't mind —our coming?" she asked.

"Mind!" he called out, with robust impressiveness. "Mind!" As if to complete the expression of his meaning, he threw his arm loosely about her, where she stood, and brought her to his side. They remained standing thus, before the fireplace, after the others were all seated.

"Mr. Thorpe has been outlining to me the most wonderful plans," said the Duke, looking from one face to another, with a reserved smile. "It seems that philanthropy fails unless it is combined with very advanced politics. It is a new idea to me—but he certainly states it with vigour. Do you understand it, Edith?"

"Oh, perfectly," replied the wife, smilingly. "I am his first convert. Behold in me the original disciple."

"The worst of that is," commented Thorpe, with radiant joviality, "she would subscribe to any other new doctrine of mine just as readily." He tightened the arm

encircling her by a perceptible trifle. "Would n't you, sweetheart?" he demanded.

She seemed in nowise embarrassed by these overt endearments. There was indeed the dimmest suggestion in her face and voice of a responsive mood. "Really," she began, with a soft glance, half-deprecation, half-pride, bent upon the others, and with thoughtful deliberation, —"really the important thing is that he should pursue some object—have in view something that he is determined to master. Without that, he is not contented—not at his best. He should have been a soldier. He has a passion for battle in his blood. And now that he sees something he is eager to do—I am very glad. It makes it none the less acceptable that good is to come from it."

"I still maintain," said Miss Madden, interpolating her words through the task of lighting a cigarette, and contriving for them an effect of drollery which appealed to Thorpe most of all—"I shall always insist, just the same, that crime was his true vocation."

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